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Performing Grief

ANNE E. MCLAREN

BRIDAL LAMENTS IN RURAL CHINA

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Bridal Laments in Rural China

ANNE E. MCLAREN

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Preface

In pre-modern China and even in the present day it is the girls and women of rural China who are the least likely to be literate and to compose works recognized as 'literature'. Scholars trained in sinology, that is, in the skills needed to interpret the texts of Chinese civilization, all too rarely ask questions about the experience of non-literate people. Nonetheless, as we know from recent discoveries, unlearned women of rural China are the inheritors of a vibrant tradition of oral and ritual performances. The most striking example that has come to light over the past two decades is that of the Women's Script culture of Jiangnan County, Hunan Province. Women's Script is considered to be the world's only known gender-specific script. Women's Script compositions are almost invariably composed in rhyming verse and comprise stories and songs derived from a rich tradition of performance arts transmitted over the generations in this remote rural region. With the discovery of the Women's Script writings, one could begin to talk for the first time of a female line of oral transmission relying on poetic genres to convey the insights, experiences, and grievances of one of the most dispossessed sectors of Chinese society. Women's Script is no doubt unique, but the oral performance complex that supports it derives from traditions prevalent more broadly in Chinese society.

It was curiosity about the little-known oral culture of Chinese women that led me to write this first monographic study of Chinese bridal laments. I have long had an interest in the storytelling and folkloric culture of the lower Yangzi delta, and have completed a study of a type of song-prose narrative called 'chantefable' that was very popular in both performance and in print with women in the late imperial period (McLaren 1998). However, very little is known about the oral performance arts of women of the region. I was excited to learn from Shanghai folklore specialists that women in 'backward' coastal communities in Nanhui County outside Shanghai had continued to perform bridal and funeral laments well into the twentieth century. Furthermore, a substantial corpus of laments had been taped and were available in Chinese transcription.

In August and September 1994, I visited Nanhui County accompanied by Professor Chen Qinjian, a specialist in Chinese folk performance and customs from East China Normal University (ECNU), Shanghai. We interviewed members of the Nanhui Culture Bureau and listened to the laments and songs of local practitioners. I was given booklets of transcribed laments, but was largely unable to comprehend these due to the use of non-standard characters to record the Wu dialect spoken in the area. In July 1996, Chen Qinjian, who is a native of the Pudong-Nanhui region, visited Melbourne for several weeks and began to explain and translate each line of the transcript of Pan Cailian's laments into Mandarin Chinese. On a further trip to Nanhui in December 1997, accompanied by Chen, I decided to investigate the material culture and kinship structure of Shuyuan, the home area of Pan Cailian, whose lament cycle is translated here, and other practitioners. A trip to Shanghai in December 1998 allowed for another period of intensive interpretation and translation work on the laments. In June 1999 we returned to Nanhui, this time to interview generations of women in Sanlin and Shuyuan about bridal laments and marriage customs. This has been followed by subsequent visits to Shanghai in November 2000, December 2003, and August and November 2004. In these activities we were assisted by members of the Nanhui Culture Bureau, staff members and postgraduates of the Folk Performance Section of the Chinese Department of ECNU, and the Foreign Office of the ECNU. This project has received funding from the Australia Research Council and the University of Melbourne Grant-in-Aid Committee. The Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation paid for my trip to Taipei and visit to the Academia Sinica. Chen Qinjian's visit to Australia was funded by the Australia-China Council. I record my appreciation here to all the above.

I would like to express my particular gratitude to Chen Qinjian for arranging my field trips and meetings with women of the region, for opening up various lines of enquiry with regard to bridal laments and marriage practices, and, not least, for elucidating the lament cycle of Pan Cailian. He constantly encouraged me in this project over many years and his assistance was indispensable in completing this study.

Chen introduced me to Jiang Bin (at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), a veteran researcher in the folk culture and belief systems of the Jiangsu-Zhejiang region. My thanks for hospitality at his home and important references on local bridal laments. Ren Jiahe, the chief editor of the lament transcriptions, and his daughter, Ren Liping, were of great assistance during my field trips to Nanhui. I would also like to thank Pan Wenzhen of the Nanhui Region Culture Bureau for arranging for me to listen to laments performed by the Nanhui women Wang Xuehong and Ji Shunxian in August to September 1994, and for explaining the local marriage practices. Wang Jingen, a talented carver of stone crafts, and his wife, Huang Huoxian, provided many insights into the material culture of coastal

Nanhui, including cotton spinning and weaving, and provided me with meals in their home in Shuyuan. In Sanlin township in the western Pudong region, I learnt much about women's lives and marriages from the women introduced to me by Chen Qinjian. My warm thanks to all the people of Nanhui who have played a role in the making of this book.

My thanks to Cynthia Brokaw for forwarding to me a printed text of bridal laments she discovered at the Chengdu Municipal Library. These curious texts appear to be laments revised along Confucian lines for publication as instructional texts for women, and bear little relationship to the oral laments examined in this volume. Nonetheless, they are valuable as rare examples of bridal laments in print in the late imperial period. I also am grateful to M. S. Chan of the Chinese department of the University of Hong Kong, who offered me hospitality while I was in Hong Kong in 2001 as well as access to the Fung Ping Shan Library, where I came across the valuable lament transcriptions of Hong Kong laments by Cheung Cheng-ping.

I would particularly like to thank Liu Fei-wen of the Ethnology Institute at the Academia Sinica, Taipei, for meeting me in December 2004 and sharing her experiences of doing fieldwork with Women's Script practitioners. Dr. Liu is one of the few scholars who are conducting an ongoing investigation into this extraordinary community of women, and her studies of Women Script culture place her at the forefront of this field. Also at the Academia Sinica Ethnology Institute, I was delighted to meet again Teri Silvio and learn more of her work in women's operatic performance in Taiwan.

I was also fortunate to meet briefly with Rubie S. Watson at the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, an expert on the expressive culture of Chinese women, inter alia and learn more about her work and that of other anthropologists concerning the laments of the Hong Kong region. Thanks too to Wilt Idema, professor of Chinese literature at Harvard University, for many conversations over the years on this and other topics and much encouragement. I have also gathered inspiration from the work of Antonia Finnane, my colleague at the University of Melbourne, particularly from her pioneering study on the gendering of the Chinese environment ("Water, Love, and Labor", 1998). Kevin Stuart kindly sent me his study of Qinghai Salar laments (Ma Wei, Ma Jianzhong, and Kevin Stuart, "The Xunhua Salar Wedding", 1999). Joanna Handlin Smith *(Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies)* has offered perceptive comments, encouragement, and warm hospitality over many years. My gratitude also to the anonymous reviewers for the University of Hawai'i Press who offered many insightful comments for revision and clarifying my ideas. Pamela Kelley also provided efficient and prompt assistance to my enquiries.

* * *

I have presented my research findings on women's laments at a number of gatherings, including the conference "Traditional Chinese Women through a Modern Lens" held at the Fairbank Center, Harvard University, 16–18 June 2006. Western audiences are often intrigued by the strong rhetoric of female grievance that lies at the heart of lament material. However, I am often asked how 'authentic' this material actually is as an expression of grievance. After all, the lament is a formulaic performance art transmitted by generations of women, not the individual creation of any one woman. Does the collective nature of this performance art render the grievance meaningless? Feminist scholars are also concerned that Chinese laments, in repeating images of victimization under the old order, add little to emerging arguments about the agency of Chinese women in a patriarchal society. In this study I have sought to respond to these sorts of questions by deepening my enquiry into the lament as an example of an orally transmitted 'technology' (to quote Walter J. Ong) and by further exploring the performance and ritual efficacy of bridal laments within their receiving communities. My sincere thanks go to Ellen Widmer (Wellesley College) and Grace Fong (McGill University) for inviting me to this conference, and to the discussant, Judith T. Zeitlin, and conference members Susan Mann, Maureen Robertson, Robyn Hamilton, Hua Wei, Hu Siaochen, Beata Grant, and many others for stimulating discussion.

As always, my family has been a great support in spite of my frequent absences. Special thanks to Lawrence and Laura.

* * *

Part of Chapter 4 appeared in different form in "Mothers, Daughters and the Socialisation of the Chinese Bride", *Asian Studies Review* 27, no. 1 (March 2003): 1–21. Brief excerpts from the lament cycle of Pan Cailian in English translation appeared in an earlier article, Anne McLaren and Chen Qinjian, "The Oral and Ritual Culture of Chinese Women: Bridal Lamentations of Nanhui", *Asian Folklore Studies* 59 (2001): 205–238. All material has been revised for this book.

Introduction

At the home of the bride, they weep and wail till Heaven resounds,
At the home of the groom, their property swells and grows by bounds.[1]

Men fear to write and women fear to weep.[2]

These popular sayings from Pudong-Nanhui, a region on the coastal border of modern-day Shanghai, reflect local understandings of the importance of bridal laments, a little-studied folk genre performed before the socialist revolution across vast areas of China. The first saying encapsulates the view that bridal weeping and wailing at the time of marriage had a ritual or magical potency. In an act of cosmic resonance, the bride's wailing would evoke a parallel response from Heaven.[3] The more she wept and wailed, the more riches and property would flow to the home of the groom. The second saying alludes to the perceived commensurability of quintessential male and female talents. Men gained status from 'performing' literacy and writing, and women from 'performing' weeping and wailing. The usefulness of literacy in a society where the male pursuit of writing could win an official post is self-evident. What women gained from their performances known as *ku,* "weeping and wailing", is much less obvious. Yet young women in this coastal region as well as their counterparts in the Chinese hinterland went to great lengths to master an elaborate verbal art form known as *kujia* or "weeping on being married off".

Relatively little is known of the performative and ritual arts of Chinese women.[4] In this study I will bring to light an ancient folk art now in decline but that was once a signal mark of female status, talent, and virtue across broad areas of China. Why did women feel obliged to lament in village communities in premodern China? Why was the practice not only tolerated but admired and praised? What did women seek to communicate through their rhetoric of grievance? In

seeking to explore these issues, I argue that in lament communities there existed a shared cultural framework in which female lamentation 'made sense' and was highly valued. Many decades after the decline of the lament genre, and in the absence of an ongoing performance tradition, it is not easy to interpret the significance of women's laments in their original cultural context. Nonetheless, it is important to make the attempt. The ability to move an audience through a lament was perceived to be one of the most important symbolic skills that women possessed in many Chinese communities before the socialist era. In her discussion of the bridal laments of Jiangyong County, Hunan, Liu Fei-wen has argued that "bridal lamenting is the only formal occasion where a woman's literary talent can be openly demonstrated and her voice publicly acknowledged."[5] An understanding of the place of laments in Chinese culture promises to enrich our understanding of women's social and performance roles, the gendered nature of China's ritual culture, and the continuous transmission of women's grievance genres from the imperial past to the revolutionary period and beyond.

Laments and Female Grievance

Studies on women's performance traditions around the world have tended to focus on two main concerns. The first is to bring to light little-studied folk genres associated with women with a view to rendering visible a social group often marginalized or oppressed in their own society and ignored in mainstream scholarship.[6] Around the world, laments are particularly associated with women. Female lament traditions include those of the Laymi Indians of Bolivia,[7] Greek women,[8] the Kaluli women of Papua New Guinea,[9] the crying songs of the Untouchable women of India,[10] the Araucanian women's laments of Chile,[11] the funeral laments of Irish women,[12] and bridal departure songs in North India.[13] There are occasional exceptions to the dominance of this genre by women—for example, the ritual wailing of Shavante Indians in Brazil, which is performed by both men and women.[14] However, as Joel Sherzer observes, laments "are a woman's genre, even in societies where both men and women perform them".[15]

A second concern is to understand the nature of the female grievances constructed in laments. Women's oral traditions commonly focus on women's complaints: for instance, the Indian 'crying songs' performed by low-caste women investigated by M. Egnor; the *dukha* (suffering) songs of Nepali women;[16] the personal stories of suffering told by Paxtun women in Afghanistan;[17] the wedding laments of Finnish-Karelian communities;[18] and the narratives of personal sorrow embedded in Chinese Women's Script compositions.[19] Scholars interested in women's oral arts often propose that their folk genres reflect resistance to or protest against patriarchal structures, or at the very least offer alternative under-

standings of key cultural values. Gloria G. Raheja and Ann Grodzins Gold, for example, speak of women's songs as examples of "ironic and subversive commentaries" on patriarchal kinship roles and note that the songs contain "alternative representations of marriage and kinship".[20] As I shall discuss later, some Chinese scholars have interpreted Chinese lament traditions as examples of proto-feminist expression.

A different perspective is offered by those scholars who point to the limited nature of the resistance expressed by women in folk genres. Stanley Tambiah, for example, dismisses women's performances of protest as "context-restricted rituals of rebellion",[21] and Lila Abu-Lughod criticises those who would romanticise women's folk genres as examples of proto-feminist resistance to patriarchal norms.[22] This latter approach has influenced Western studies of the oral culture of Chinese women. Anthropologist Cathy Silber, in a pioneering study on Women's Script, has urged caution in romanticizing Women's Script writings "as a discourse of resistance . . . against gender oppression".[23] Liu Fei-wen, in numerous studies, has given us a nuanced understanding of what women were able to achieve with the power of Women's Script compositions. She demonstrates that Women's Script wedding literature contained instructional material and hence served the purpose of socializing the bride along patriarchal lines. At the same time, the compositions contained an implicit reflection on and critique of this "male-defined value system".[24] In a further study, she argues that "Through literary expression, women were able to transcend the conditions of the 'inner quarters' and of the Confucian *sancong* ideologies." [25]

Another perspective, one that has influenced this study, draws from the known characteristics of oral traditions worldwide. Oral traditions are considered to be special forms of discourse such as epic poems, songs, chants, narratives, and proverbs composed in poetic language and transmitted over the generations within a community.[26] More broadly, oral traditions refer to the transmission of knowledge systems, beliefs, and mythologies of the participants. They reflect collective, not individual, composition and contain material from an earlier era as well as modifications made by the current generation. It follows that the imagistic content does not reflect in a transparent way the social realities of the region at the time of performance. For the same reason, these genres should not be interpreted as acts of protest or resistance by any individual performer. In a lament community, for example, the expression of female grievance was a learned activity of women growing up in that region. Women acquired a repertoire of stereotypical poetic material and deployed it in line with the rules of the genre. Their performance was always limited by generic and social boundaries. The lamenting bride in China would protest being sent away from her natal home on marriage but would not protest the choice of partner or the notion of arranged marriage. Nor was she likely to resist the act of marriage itself. Her lament was not understood

as a form of marriage resistance but rather as an integral part of the ceremony of her departure.

In other words, the 'authenticity' of the grievance as expressed by any individual performer was in one sense irrelevant. The performer was simply carrying out the expected grievance genre of her region in the appropriate manner to achieve the desired social or ritual effect.[27] Yet laments, sung in a repetitive melodic chant, had a hypnotic and powerful effect on both performer and audience. In fact, the lament could not be deemed effective if it did not lead to actual weeping and sobbing. It was not so much the rational 'meaning' of the lament as its enactment within the three-day period of the bride's permanent departure from her natal home that imbued the lament with its dramatic conviction and fascination for the audience. The hyperbolic expression of female grievance was thus essential to its emotional power.[28]

Nonetheless, the bridal lament could readily be adapted to convey a personal grievance. Jim Wilce has examined the case of a Bangladeshi woman who used the lament genre of her region to protest her mistreatment, thus causing embarrassment to her family.[29] In the contemporary period, the Finnish-Karelian lament has been adapted to deal with the refugee experience of displacement.[30] Elizabeth Tolbert notes that a lamenter can personalize her experience through "specific references to events, places, and persons, and through the manipulation of formal elements and the musical, textual, and emotive domains."[31] Liu Fei-wen has discussed in some detail how the local lament form was adapted by a woman of Jiangyong County to resist an arranged marriage organised by her mother.[32] I shall discuss further cases where the lament is put to the service of individual grievance in Chapter 5.

In spite of its inherited, largely formulaic content, the Chinese lament is a folk genre of considerable artistry and sophistication. It opens a window to a world little seen by those immersed in China's textual civilisation. There are probably no other forms of discourse in Chinese culture that present with such great clarity how illiterate Chinese women in the pre-modern period constructed the operations of kinship hierarchies, the marriage market that determined their destiny, and the shadow cast by the Chinese state even in remote rural communities. In laments, we hear the voices of women in terms unknown to more orthodox genres. For example, we can glean a girl's understanding of the common practice of female infanticide (at one point she says her father should have killed her as an infant). We hear her perception of what it feels like to put on the red wedding veil that will blind her for the duration of her lengthy journey to the groom's home ("I look like a speckled duck, not human at all!"). We also hear her curse the matchmaker in dramatic, ribald terms and complain vividly about the unjust treatment she expects from her new female kin ("their cold hard eyes"). She calls on her brothers to remember her and not abandon her. She alludes to tribute grain, the awesome

power of officialdom, and the avuncular kindness of the emperor. Through the bride's use of metaphor and allusion, we gain a sense of how illiterate classes in pre-modern China understood, echoed, reinterpreted, or resisted key values of Chinese culture: the power of the household gods, a belief in the imperial system, awe of officialdom, the prestige of literacy and learning, the value of women's labour, and the differential fates of men and women.

Oral Traditions and Communities

In the months before marriage the bride-to-be mastered the imagery and poetic formulae of the type of lament sung in her village. In so doing, she came to understand her place in the social order of her community and her role in the marriage exchange. The Nanhui lamenter communicated strong and powerful 'messages', even though these were collective rather than individual and always bounded by the regional tradition. This brings us to the relationship between a folk genre and its society of origin, one of the most fundamental issues in the field of oral traditions. In a seminal study dealing mainly with Africa, Jan Vansina has examined the relationship between narratives and epics dealing with past events and the recuperation of historical realities. He argues that oral traditions "are congruent with the society to which they belong" [33] and, further, that "every traditional message has a particular purpose and fulfils a particular function, otherwise it would not survive".[34] In *Oral Tradition as History,* he puts forward a range of methodologies to assess the historical value of accounts dealing with the past. These include interpreting oral traditions as an expression of the identity of the group within the institutional framework of its performance; defining the extent to which the oral genre is conservative or allows for innovation; assessing the variability of the tradition over time; and understanding the role of formulized language in creating a useful mnemonic within which the repertoire can be transmitted. Concerning the vexed issue of 'meaning' in oral genres, Vansina calls for an analysis of "the literal meaning" and "the intended meaning". The latter works through rhetorical tropes and imagery.[35] Intended meanings are unstated but are apparent to the audience, although possibly not to an outsider. The generic expectations, the form and content of the genre, also need to be appreciated, together with the expectations of the receiving community. The "culture-bound" nature of the genre can thus be defined through its customary performance conventions. One can deduce meanings from seeing how the 'messages' of a genre are used and who benefits.[36] Traditions can serve to justify existing conditions or to aid one side in a dispute.[37] Individual performers can have their own agendas, which need to be assessed.[38] Above all, the message expresses the culture of its people: "Culture can be defined as what is common in the minds of a given group of people." [39]

Since Vansina's pioneering study, scholars increasingly argue that the relationship between folk genre and society is more complicated than simply that of 'congruence'. The notion of congruence has been replaced by notions of debate, negotiation, and contestation. Margaret T. Egnor, for example, in her study of the "crying songs" of the Untouchables in Tamil Nadu focuses on the 'message' of the songs in terms of the agenda and life strategies of the women performers. Noting that the crying songs project a grievance to a person of higher status than the performer, she concludes that these songs "protest not only the personal suffering of the singer, but the rules of hierarchy themselves".[40] Oral traditions are seen to actively construct the collective identity of a 'folk community'. Joyce B. Flueckiger, in studying regional variants in epic traditions in India, notes that the variant enacted by women performers in Chhattisgarh reflects the relatively favourable status of women in this region and their strong participation in labour.[41] The relationship between genres in multi-ethnic communities and their often contrasting attributes has led to the notion of 'ethnic genres' taking their place with a system of genres and reflecting particular communicative modes.[42]

In the study of folklore or folk ethnography, performance refers to the form, content, enactment, reception, and verbal art of folk genres.[43] However, in recent decades notions of performance have been applied to a wide range of fields in historical, ritual, identity, literary, and gender studies, to the extent that it has become customary to talk of "culture as performance", in the words of Peter Burke.[44] Historians now analyse the 'performances' of honour or nobility in literate societies; feminist scholars investigate 'performances' of masculinity or femininity and anthropologists and historians the 'performance' of emotions in culturally specific contexts.[45] Notions of power and inequalities in these cultural performances have been given an impetus by the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly his idea of the "habitus", the unconscious dispositions that govern everyday life. Habitus involves the "regulated improvisation" of human activity within the cultural "scripts" employed by the individual without conscious reflection. An investigation of the social conditions under which these unthinking activities are performed allows for a nuanced understanding of the 'meaning' of transmitted, collective practices and the power relationships that lie behind them. In the words of Bourdieu, "It is because subjects do not strictly speaking know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know."[46]

This study of women's bridal laments in China will draw both on the idea of oral traditions as works of verbal art belonging to a collective transmission (Bauman 1977) and on the notion of women's folk genres as the cultural enactment, reproduction, and creative negotiation of gendered hierarchies within a patriarchal society. In learning, mastering, and then performing the lament repertoire at the liminal time of marriage, the bride enacted a transformation of her identity

from daughter to wife.[47] Also, regional traditions could be flexibly adapted to local and individual conditions. In the case of Nanhui laments, the bride can conjure up her specific location, its topography, architecture, and objects of material culture to create a sense of "my place" that resonates with her audience (Chapter 1). Further, she can decide to either curse the matchmaker or praise her, depending on how pleased she feels with the marriage arrangement (Chapter 4). The bride can select imagery relating to the dowry and bride-price as applicable to her circumstances and level of satisfaction. She can sincerely thank her kinfolk for adding to her trousseau or subtly imply they did not add enough (Chapter 4). New imagery is added as circumstances change; for example, Western objects became part of the bride's dowry and hence of the lament material by the late nineteenth century (Chapter 1). In the Pearl River delta, women could use their laments to voice a specific grievance to the point of leading to friction within the community (discussed in Chapter 5). In this way the individual performer is involved in neither resistance nor compliance but in a process of debate and negotiation of contested cultural values.[48]

Nanhui people believe that men aspired to write and women aspired to weep. In what sort of social and gender configuration are these two 'performances' perceived as analogous? In order to begin to respond to these questions, we need to understand the Nanhui lament within its broad socio-economic context, the gendered division of labour, kinship and marriage formations, as well as the characteristics of the bridal lament as an aspect of orally transmitted culture, its typical repertoire, generic conventions, and performative characteristics. To do justice to this project I will need to draw on a range of perspectives: those of ethnography, orality and literacy, social history, and performance traditions.

Laments in Chinese Culture

In Nanhui, the bride began lamenting on the third day before her permanent departure from the natal home. She was watched appreciatively by an audience that included her immediate family, female relatives, villagers passing by, and local girls eager to learn the art from direct observation. In the months before marriage, the bride needed to master each stage of the lengthy performance, from the sung 'dialogue' with her mother, to formalised thanks and farewells to each member of her family, as well as thanks to the local female ritual specialists and the matchmaker. As in other oral traditions amongst illiterate peoples, the bride would master by observation and practice a poetic repertoire of easily memorised verbal formulae passed down within her local region. In lament performance, she would chant or sing the repertoire, manipulating the content, tone, and imagery to suit her particular needs. Singing slowly in a simple dirge-like tune, the bride would regularly

break down into tearful sobs and be comforted by her audience. In words of protest rarely seen in the refined tenor of Chinese textual civilisation, she would rail at the injustice of women being sent off in marriage and protest the more favourable treatment of her brothers and the way she was being 'sold' in marriage. Her often histrionic language appeared to violate norms of feminine docility, but her articulation of grievance was accepted as a daughter's natural expression of sorrow and filial love upon her permanent removal from the natal home.

In many areas of rural China before the communist revolution, this expression of grief and protest was an integral part of the ritual and folk performance culture of the region. Lamenting formed part of a girl's socialisation. The young Nanhui girl would learn snatches of laments while weeding cotton or working on cotton textiles with the other women. When her time came, she would seek out an admired practitioner to learn the repertoire. The bridal lament was only the first type of lament to be learnt. In the course of her lifetime, she would also master funeral laments (*kusang*, or "weeping at the funeral").[49] The thanks and farewells made to her parents on departure at marriage would thus be matched by similar ritual farewells to them at death. Through *kusang* she could also ritually care for the souls of her husband and his parents. It was only in the twentieth century, when the imperial examination system was abolished and literacy was advocated for both men and women, that the art of lamentation became not a hallmark of female intelligence and talent but a sign of backwardness and victimisation.

By the late twentieth century it was only the so-called minority peoples in Chinese space who still possessed living lament traditions.[50] In particular, the Tujia people of the upper Yangzi, a people of ambiguous ethnicity, have a rich lament tradition that has been transmitted to the present day.[51] In the West, the best-known Chinese laments are those of the Pearl River delta and Hong Kong New Territories in the southern periphery of China. These traditions have been investigated by anthropologists C. Fred Blake, Elizabeth L. Johnson, and Rubie S. Watson.[52] The lengthiest study of Chinese bridal laments is by Tan Daxian, who observed firsthand the bridal laments of the Dongwan region in the Hong Kong New Territories and collected transcripts and secondary sources on laments throughout China and Taiwan.[53] Tan's study is the most comprehensive available, but he was not able to take advantage of the largest corpus of bridal laments now available in transcription, those of Nanhui in the lower Yangzi delta.[54] In the Nanhui corpus we can see, for the first time, the full complexity of the Han Chinese bridal lament, which was performed at various stages during the three-day ritual of departure.

As I discuss in Chapter 5, lament traditions across China share many commonalities. The lament performance is carefully segmented, with the bride performing different types of laments depending on whom she is addressing and the stage reached in the departure ceremony. Lament material is tuneful and poetically

patterned, but practitioners generally refer to their performance as *ku* (weeping and wailing) rather than singing *(ge)*. Laments are always performed in the spoken language of that region. Each local tradition has its own formulaic poetic content and is closely reliant on the distinct songs and poetic traditions of its home region. The Nanhui laments, for example, relate to the songs known as *Wu ge* or songs of the Wu (lower Yangzi) area. All known lament traditions convey a similar burden of female grief and protest, although this is expressed in diverse ways. Little is known of the history of laments as the genre was largely unrecorded in historical accounts. However, as I will argue here, the known corpus appears to relate both to ancient wailed performances in north China and to women's singing traditions found south of the Yangzi.

In the twentieth century women's laments became one of the 'backward' practices scorned by revolutionaries. The devaluing of the 'superstitious' practices of 'ignorant' women began in the May Fourth era from the 1920s, when Chinese intellectuals called for the overthrow of Confucian practice and the adoption of Western-style modernity. In his famous novel *Family* (*Jia,* 1931), Ba Jin scoffed at the women who carried out histrionic wailing on the death of the family patriarch. He notes that the women guests who came to 'help' combined impassioned sobs with pouring out their own grievances (*Jia,* chap. 35, p. 397). This is a common feature of funeral laments, as women blend mourning for the deceased with complaints about the hardships of their own life. In *Family,* the act of lamentation is perceived as women's work: "The men and women each did their own job. Three or four women relatives were called on to stay by the deceased and lament *(ku)*".[55] The narrator is also very clear about the point of the weeping and wailing: "everyone was busy using the deceased to maintain their face".

In the early years of the founding of the People's Republic of China, village lamenting became less and less prevalent. A short story by Zhou Libo, first published in 1957, reflects the promotion of new wedding practices and the banishing of the old. Zhou writes approvingly of an exemplary wedding ceremony in a Hunan village. The dowry and wedding meal are appropriately frugal, the bride boasts of her labour skills, and the groom, who is in charge of village stores, exits briefly during a boring wedding speech to check on the pigs. Very few of the old customs remain, but a gaggle of girlfriends of the bride continue the former practice of eavesdropping on the bridal party from the other side of the wall. The conversation turns to the relative merits of arranged as opposed to 'free' or love marriages. The leading cadre, who has been called on to officiate at the marriage, recalls how in the township of Jinshi the bride's family bring in a large number of people to 'weep' on her behalf. He continues: "In Jinshi there are men and women who perform weeping on marriage for families. They are professionals specializing in this trade. When they begin weeping, they give one example after another, all very rhythmical and measured. It sounds like singing songs and is wonderful to

listen to." [56] As he finishes speaking, he hears the bride's girlfriends giggling beyond the wall. In this story the contrast between the sounds of weeping in 'feudal' China and the robust laughter of women in the 'new' China is central to the intentions of the author.[57]

Laments were only rarely investigated by enthusiasts in the Chinese folklore study movement of the 1920s and 1930s.[58] The Japanese invasion and civil war put an end to this movement in the 1940s. After the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, bridal laments, along with other "feudal" traditions, were frowned upon and gradually fell away. New marriage practices allowing free choice in marriage undermined the very basis of the grievance behind bridal lamentations—the 'enforced' sending away of a daughter to marry a man from another village. The international isolation of socialist China and internal political movements also made it impossible for Western anthropologists to investigate the Chinese countryside before the ascendancy of Deng Xiaoping in late 1978. For this reason, lament traditions on the Chinese mainland have rarely been studied in depth, although most contemporary mainland Chinese studies of Chinese marriage refer briefly to the former practice of *kujia*. Even in the New Territories of Hong Kong, by the mid-twentieth century wedding songs were beginning to disappear as a living tradition.[59] Nanhui brides began to cease lamenting with the advent of the 'civilised marriage' (marriage based on Western forms) in the early twentieth century, and the tradition virtually died out in the early socialist period of the 1950s. The transcriptions of Nanhui laments preserved today derive, not from bridal performances, but from the repertoire of elderly practitioners who were called upon to recall the laments learned in their youth.[60]

Chinese scholars like Tan Daxian argue that laments constitute a powerful critique of women's condition under "feudalism" and "patriarchy". Citing the famous formulation of Mao Zedong, Tan declares: "If one examines the entire content of lament songs, the central core is . . . condemnation of thousands of years of 'the four ropes' of feudalism, namely religion, political power, kinship power and the rights of the husband . . .".[61] Jiang Bin, one of the few Chinese scholars to have investigated the laments of the lower Yangzi delta, concurs with the standard Chinese view that laments reflect women's resistance to feudal patriarchy. He further declares that bridal lamentations are a residual custom from the ancient practice of "marriage by capture" that is assumed to have taken place at the transition from a matrilineal to a patrilineal society. According to this line of reasoning, the latter-day lament genre reflects the historical resistance of ancient women to the terrors of "marriage by capture".[62]

Western anthropologists who have studied Chinese laments have also noticed the anomalous 'oppositionality' of this genre of female complaint in a strongly patriarchal society. However, they tend to conclude that the social function of the lament is to accommodate contradictions and strong emotions at a point of

transition for the young woman. Anthropologist Fred Blake has argued that the lament was a form of cathartic expression within a context that tolerated or even approved of this form of expression. Laments are "the licensed expression of the bride—in some sense they constitute her personal commentary on the rites".[63] Elizabeth Johnson, in her study of the Hakka women's funeral laments from Kwan Mun Hau in Hong Kong's New Territories, notes that their laments are essentially solitary performances, in contradistinction to the collective ancestral rituals of the men. In spite of the implicit criticism contained in laments, they do not threaten male concerns and for that reason are tolerated or even considered appropriate.[64] Essentially, laments are an expressive genre where "individual grievances could be publicly and poetically expressed".[65] In her more recent study of the same region, Johnson notes that women's songs and laments "were women's only legitimate means of vocal expression in public contexts" and, further, that "laments offered a vehicle for individual self-expression through which a woman could make public her private grievances".[66]

Rubie S. Watson, who has investigated the laments of Ha Tsuen in the Hong Kong New Territories, concentrates on the social dimension of local laments and accompanying marriage rituals. She argues that these rituals serve to transform young girls into married women and to express the ambiguous emotions and divided loyalties of brides as they leave their natal home. Fertility is found to be an important concern. The older women of the village served as ritual instructors of young girls and presided over the marriage ceremonies: "It is their job to empty the bride-daughter and to reconstruct her as a fertile wife".[67] Women used laments to carry out their duties to both their natal and their married families in order to achieve a feminine version of the Confucian virtue of filial piety. Watson thus concludes that laments are not the product of "an autonomous female realm", nor could they be called "oppositional".[68] Instead, laments provide an opportunity for women to reflect on "the contradictions inherent in their own lives as daughters, friends and wives".[69]

Folklorists and anthropologists, working with women who were themselves lament practitioners, have told us much about the social function of laments and how to interpret the rhetoric of grievance. They have demonstrated that laments allow for the expression of grief and protest in socially acceptable ways, and for the bride to express filiality towards her natal family. Anthropologists argue that the female grievances so expressed did not seek to subvert the established order and thus were not oppositional, but functioned rather as a 'licensed' contribution to the expressive culture of the region. However, these earlier studies have little to say about why laments take the form that they do and why they appear to be an integral part of the folk performance of certain communities. This is no doubt due to the limited and fragmentary nature of the material available in transcription, which rarely permits an overview of a complete lament cycle from any one

region.[70] In addition, all Western studies to date have concentrated on the Hong Kong New Territories region. This study, taking advantage of recent transcriptions from Nanhui, is the first Western study of laments from the Chinese heartland territory of Jiangnan, centered on the lower Yangzi delta.

Laments and Ritual Power

One aspect that has been muted so far in discussion of the function of laments is their possible ritual or exorcistic nature. It is very difficult to establish data proving definitively the ritual nature of laments. Very few literati in imperial times showed any interest in the oral genres of illiterate rural women, and the bridal lament is no longer performed as a living tradition amongst recognised Han Chinese communities. Yet, as I argue here, there are various indications in the kinds of popular sayings given at the beginning of this chapter, in folk legends about the origin of bridal laments, in the words of practitioners in many regional traditions, in ancient forms of magical performance known as *ku* (weeping and wailing), and in the folk beliefs surrounding the dangers of marriage, that point to a ritual or exorcistic function for bridal laments. I was first alerted to this possibility when an elderly woman whom I met in Shuyuan, Nanhui, told me that the purpose of her bridal lament was to "weep and wail until the noxious vapours went away" *(kudiao huiqi)*. Scholars investigating the Pearl River delta lament form have occasionally noted the same phenomenon. Blake, citing the local folklorist Chang Cheung-ping, observed that the Hong Kong laments he studied "invoke good fortune for the bride's family, obtain luck for the bride and expel noxious influences from the neighbourhood".[71] Eugene Anderson, who translated one lamentation-type song from amongst the "Talking Songs" (wedding songs) of Hong Kong boat women, noted that these songs were attributed an auspicious or "magical" power.[72]

If laments were held to have an exorcistic power, if histrionic wailing could chase away the evil spirits of misfortune and bring on good fortune, then one can understand why women in these communities were obliged to lament. If laments fulfilled an important ritual role of protecting the community, then a woman's mastery of lament performance could be perceived as commensurate with a man's mastery of writing. Both literacy and lamenting involved the arduous acquisition of a disciplinary skill that provided their performers with powerful techniques to exercise ritual control, bolster their personal status, and safeguard the community.

Studies of women's ritual power have noted that ritual efficacy is an important marker of prestige and serves to ameliorate extremes of patriarchal subservience. Mary Elaine Hegland, in her study of the rituals of Pakistan Shi'a women, believes that women use these rituals to preserve "an oblique, undeclared contestation

against their subordinate position in a harshly patriarchal society".[73] On the other hand, Tracy Pintchman, in her study of Indian Kartik ritual worship, notes that the women concerned do not challenge "conservative tradition" but use ritual worship to "reinforce" their roles as wives and mothers. Denied the forms of conspicuous asceticism deemed appropriate for males, women have constructed their own rituals and in this way enhanced their "prestige and influence" and sense of personal worth.[74] In similar fashion, Mary Hancock has argued, in her study of Hindu women's ritual, that ritual forms can 'hail' an individual as a worthy member of a particular social category, class, or caste.[75]

In my own explorations of the Chinese lament, I have gradually arrived at the view that women in Nanhui, and possibly other lament communities in China, were obliged to learn to lament because the genre played an important role in ritually preserving the community at the dangerous time of transition that takes place at marriage and death. In other words, the bridal lament, at least in some traditions, was considered a form of verbal sorcery, not simply as a ceremonial song or a song of consolation. Lament performance was held to be efficacious in exorcising the forces of evil and bringing on a tide of favourable fortune. From this point of view, laments are one of the informal exorcistic activities commonly performed by Chinese women and a rare example of the visible exercise of ritual power by women in a male-dominated society.[76] This ritual role was so important that women sought out lament practitioners to master as much of the lament repertoire as they could in the months leading up to their marriage. From childhood they observed lament performances of other women in their village in preparation for the performance that would mark their own passage to adulthood. In this way laments became a significant marker both of maturity and of female talent within their community. But they were more than just perfunctory ritual performance. In this study I have paid careful attention to what the women seek to communicate through their laments. Their goal was to induce both performer and onlookers to feel sorrow to the point where they would break down into tearful sobbing. If Heaven did not resound with the cries of weeping and wailing, as in the local saying, then the lament would not be ritually efficacious and the performer would be considered to lack talent. The verbal artistry of the lament, the strength and plausibility of the grievance, as well as the skill of the enactment, were thus integral to the emotional and ritual power of the lament.

The Bridal Laments of Nanhui

The Nanhui lament cycle investigated here derives from the tradition that circulated in the 1920s and was in turn passed down from that prevalent in the late nineteenth century. In this study I have taken advantage of the printed transcrip-

tion of one 'entire' lament cycle representing all the stages of the lament in this local tradition. The lamenter was a woman called Pan Cailian, whose performance was recorded by cadres of the Nanhui Culture Bureau in 1982 and 1984. According to family member and cadre from the Nanhui Culture Bureau Pan Wenzhen, a first attempt was made to transcribe her laments in the 1960s. However, during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), these documents were burnt as examples of the feudal "Four Olds". It was only in the early 1980s that an attempt at official recuperation became possible. Pan's taped laments were ultimately transcribed and published by China Folk Arts publication house.[77] Shanghai scholars of local oral arts Chen Qinjian and Jiang Bin believe the lamentations of Nanhui are amongst the most complete of Han Chinese *kujia* cycles continuing into the mid-twentieth century.[78]

Pan Cailian was born in 1907, so at the time of her taped performance she was in her seventies. She had passed away before the occasion of my first visit to Nanhui in 1994, but I was able to meet and interview family member Pan Wenzhen, who had assisted in the recording of Cailian's laments. Pan Cailian had been singled out by the culture cadres as a particularly good practitioner who could recall a relatively full cycle of lamentations. She had been reluctant at first to perform funeral laments because she had lost too many family members and feared bringing on bad luck. It was considered extremely unlucky to sing a funeral lament for a member who was still alive. Similarly, with the wedding laments, as a married woman with three sons, she felt very distant from the circumstances of a bride departing her natal home. However, once she began, she was able to recapture much of the emotion she had felt as a young bride. Because the opening segment of lamentations involves both the mother and the daughter, another elderly practitioner, Zhang Wenxian, was invited to perform the role of mother while Pan played the part of the bride.

Pan was characteristic of Chinese women lamenters in that she was illiterate and from a poor rural family belonging to "the sands people" of coastal Nanhui. She had learnt her repertoire of laments and folk songs from a local village woman. At the age of twenty she was married to a man who smoked opium and gambled, practices that led to the gradual impoverishment of the family. Forced out of her home, at first she stayed at the home of her *saosao* or elder brother's wife, but later on resorted to living in a lean-to dwelling on the landlord's estate. She gave birth to three children but had no means to keep them and they were adopted by other families. The laments analysed here are thus those of an elderly woman whose marriage ended in disappointment and lifelong poverty. In her elicited performance, she re-created the fears and anticipations of those dramatic days when she stood on the verge of womanhood, her fate yet to be determined.

The Nanhui lament corpus extant today in published transcription derives from a living lament tradition that took shape within the highly commodified

society of Jiangnan, the richest region in China, at the denouement of the imperial era. In coastal Jiangnan, women's labour in the spinning and weaving of cotton textiles was a fundamental aspect of the cash economy and critical for household survival. Census statistics indicate an acute imbalance of the sexes in Nanhui and a general shortage of marriageable women in the first half of the nineteenth century. The foundational repertoire of the Nanhui lament corpus known today was almost certainly formed prior to the mid-nineteenth century and reflects to a large extent the preoccupations of that time, including the competition for women in the marriage market and the value of the female body as site for procreation and cotton production. Extra imagery based on images of the 'foreign' was added to the repertoire during the colonial period. By the time of the birth of Pan Cailian in 1907 a new era of industrialization had taken firm hold in Shanghai, and rural women from outlying areas flocked to work in urban cotton mills. However, the new industrialization did not loom large in the world of Pan Cailian and her coastal community, which lay outside the orbit of Shanghai. For this reason her repertoire, learnt in the 1920s from a neighbour, does not reflect the momentous changes of the early twentieth century in the regions adjacent to Shanghai.

* * *

The bridal lament is a conventional genre with a collective authorship, but what the bride said differed from place to place and mattered deeply to her community. Each regional tradition was carefully crafted to capture the specificities of that region. In the case of the laments of Pan Cailian, the repertoire projects a deep sense of how women understood the social order to be constituted. The Nanhui bride, in seeking to express a grievance that would resonate deeply with her audience, articulated an identity for the community to which she belonged. Drawing on the linguistic and imagistic resources of the repertoire, she constructed an imaginary of place that defined her coastal community as impoverished but resilient and stoical, with a robust contempt for "the white-faced" people of neighbouring townships. This local identity was articulated through a complex duality contrasting the wealthy *pojia* (home of the mother-in-law) with the impoverished *niangjia* (home of the bride's mother). The bride weaved back and forth imagistically between the impoverished people living in reed huts by the coast to the tiled roofs and long eaves of residences in local towns. In this way she harnessed social antagonisms in her native area to the cause of her own rhetorical grievance. This antagonism was ameliorated by the unstated aspiration underlying the dualistic imagery, namely the goal of hypergamous marriage: a poor family seeking to marry their daughter into a wealthier one. For many Nanhui brides this was probably more myth than reality. Unlike the majority of Chinese women of the late imperial era, these coastal women did not practice footbinding. Their "big" or natural feet were a marker of low status and an impediment to marrying upwards.

In most cases they were destined to be married off to men of similar social condition. As I argue here, the lament imagery is rooted in goals of social mobility that were rarely met in practice but remained a powerful aspiration for "the people of the sands" in spite of their affected scorn for the well-to-do.

Another dominating theme is that of the bride's increasing sense of her own value and self-worth as she grows from a young girl to a mature woman. Her value is constructed through a complex poetics of the marriage market and through notions of heroic female labour. The bride traced a life trajectory that perceived the female infant as valueless and expendable; the young bride as desired but with her capability for labour as yet unproven; and, finally, the mature married woman as a paragon of female labour, a matriarchal figure who wields significant influence in her marital home. In direct address to the parents, the bride acknowledges that her parents have chosen to raise her even though she was a girl, thus giving her a certain value at birth. Now that she has reached puberty, her true market value will be rendered visible to the local community through the public display of her dowry. She exhibits a strong curiosity about her exact market value, as determined by the value of the bride-price and dowry. For the bride, the language of the marriage exchange was nothing other than the language of the marketplace. Her appropriation of the language of market rationality implicitly offered a powerful critique of the canonical version of marriage, which sought to mask the commercial transaction that lay behind the taking of a woman in patrilocal marriage.

Bridal laments need to be understood both within their specific social context and within the conventions of their generic tradition. For this reason I have divided this study into two parts to reflect my dual concerns. Part I deals specifically with the bridal laments of Nanhui and is the first such study in English of the lament in this region. In order to acquaint the reader immediately with the world of the lamenting bride, I start with "Imagining Jiangnan", a reconstruction of the social order as constructed in the lament cycle of Pan Cailian (Chapter 1). Pan Cailian was subjected to the same patrilineal kinship system as Han Chinese women in China generally. Yet in "Imagining Jiangnan" we enter into a world seemingly governed by women, where marriage is not so much the exchange of a woman's body between two patrilines as the transfer of a daughter from one 'mother-home' to another, that is, from the home of her mother *(niangjia)* to the home of her mother-in-law *(pojia)*. The two chapters that follow aim to throw light on the historic, social, and economic factors that have shaped the Nanhui lament repertoire and the bride's distinctive interpretation of the Chinese kinship system. Chapter 4 returns to the Nanhui lament form, this time to demonstrate how the bridal lament was performed in the staged context of the wedding ceremony. This chapter also treats in detail the impassioned but often contradictory 'messages' expressed by the lamenting bride. In Part II, I seek to place bridal

laments within the history of performance genres involving weeping and wailing in China and in comparative perspective with other regional lament traditions across Chinese space (Chapter 5). This comparative and historical survey, once again the first attempted in English language scholarship, lays the foundation for the analysis of the ritual function of laments as a gendered performance in Chinese culture (Chapter 6). Appended is a translation of excerpts from the lament cycle of Pan Cailian, allowing the Western reader to understand the various stages of the lament cycle and glimpse the rhetorical power of the lament within its ceremonial and ritual context.

What is the origin and history of the Chinese bridal lament? In Chapter 5 I argue that the lament form known today in south and coastal China originated from the conflation of two ancient traditions: on the one hand, performances of weeping and wailing known as *ku* prevalent in the Yellow River region in antiquity; and, on the other hand, a tradition of dialogic and choral singing known south of the Yangzi. Ancient performances of weeping and wailing had gendered attributes and were understood to reflect female virtue and talent. In cases of injustice or extreme filiality, weeping and wailing could so move the heavens that a miracle would be performed. Over time, this performance tradition blended with popular beliefs in the dangers of female pollution and the need to exorcise these at the point of marriage. In this way the belief arose that exemplary lamenting could mitigate the disasters attendant on the bride's departure.

In the revolutionary era, the ancient traditions of women's performed grievance were harnessed to 'turn over' village women to the cause of communism and gender equality. In the process, the once valued lament genre became a sign of the abject, victimised woman of the past and thus was consigned to the dustbin of history, only to re-emerge in Chinese scholarship of the 1980s as a valued gem of 'proto-feminism' or, on the other hand, as an exotic custom of non-Han Chinese 'minorities'.

* * *

Why are Chinese bridal laments worth a monographic study? The Chinese bridal lament is a vibrant example of a richly imaginative oral art that evoked intense emotions in its participants. It deserves to be better understood and to take its place within world lamenting traditions. The study of women's oral and performance culture in China also allows us to pose questions about the position of oral traditions within the edifice we have come to call "Chinese popular culture". Traditional oral arts contain in formulaic and aesthetic form a crystallization of the 'commonsense' wisdom of a social group or community, and offer insight into how the community organises kinship relations and social hierarchies or interprets key cultural values. Local oral traditions encode diverse and sometimes

contrasting adaptations of the dominant culture and its hegemonic cultural values. Women's oral arts provide us with a rare glimpse into how the Chinese world was constructed by illiterate Chinese women and how they resisted or adapted to structures that constrained them. In short, orally transmitted culture provides a powerful way of understanding the contested, heterogeneous nature of Chinese cultural practices, together with their folk rationalisations and interpretations, from the late imperial to the early modern period.

PART I

The Bridal Laments of Nanhui

The lower Yangzi delta region showing Nanhui County township and localities, January 2004. Nanhui was made a district of Shanghai in 2001.

CHAPTER 1

Imagining Jiangnan

His ancestors were not diligent and so he lives by the sea.
His buttocks thin like sticks and bamboo twigs,
He runs about from west to east.
His bed coverlet is like dried bean curd,
So stiff he can't wrap himself up in it.
He dines with just a wooden bowl,
If he eats in the morning, there's nothing left in the evening.
His dish of cabbage is topped with grass,
Stir all you like, you'll never get it down.
If you have a daughter, whatever you do, don't marry her off to a coastal man! [1]

This local ditty encodes the popular view of coastal communities and the greatest fear of the lamenting bride—that she will indeed be married off to a man living by the seawall. In this impoverished region of saline soil, food "tastes like brackish water" and "each mouthful I sip will taste like ox piss" (Thanking the Father, 34–40). Coastal Shuyuan, the home region of Pan Cailian, is located on the eastern flank of the lower Yangzi delta region, on the margins of the area that was generally known as Jiangnan in the late imperial period. Jiangnan was for centuries the wealthiest region in the whole of China and the centre of a market economy based on silk and cotton. The general pattern of Jiangnan affluence and the social dominance of local elites masked significant areas of economic distress and weak social control. The region of Jiaxing and the Hangzhou Bay to the south of Nanhui, for example, was marked by intensive agriculture, acute pressure on farming land, and severe environmental degradation.[2] In the final centuries of the imperial era, the lower classes of this region lived on the verge of destitution. Mark Elvin notes the paradox of an impoverished peasantry within one of the world's most advanced economic regions: "life in Jiaxing was short, agriculture extremely productive".[3] As we shall discuss in Part I, similar conditions shaped the lives of those who lived in coastal Nanhui.

Economic historians divide the lower Yangzi delta into "the big Yangzi delta" (the whole region including Lake Tai) and "the small Yangzi delta", comprising Suzhou and Songjiang prefectures and Taicang department. Pudong and Nanhui are located in "the small Yangzi delta".[4] Topographically, the region is basin-shaped, with uplands on the coast and lowlands in the region of Lake Tai. In the late imperial period, the eastern upland section of the delta, with its salty alkaline soil, was the centre of a major cotton industry within the prefecture of Songjiang. The western lowland section centered on Lake Tai, with its abundant waterways, was renowned for sericulture and rice paddy.

Chinese folklorists have their own way of dividing up sub-regions within the lower Yangzi delta. They typically define four sub-regions based on the nature of the original migrating communities, their linguistic attributes, and folk traditions. The area centred around Lake Tai and the city of Wuxi in the west is regarded as the prime originary area for the transmission of lengthy epic narratives about the founding of the ancient kingdom of Wu.[5] It was also renowned for the type of folk song known as *shange,* which was often sung in the paddy fields.[6] The less prosperous area north of the Yangzi River, comprising Nantong, Haimen, and Qidong, has a more heterogeneous linguistic and demographic background and a separate tradition of Wu songs. It is people from this region who in the late nineteenth century migrated to newly reclaimed farming land by the coast of Nanhui. A third sub-region, comprising Wujiang, Jiashan, and Qingpu, is located in the centre of the region, around two lake systems, Fen and Dianshan. This well-watered region has its own distinctive song tradition. The fourth sub-region is the dry uplands by the coast comprising Chuansha, Nanhui, Fengxian, and the island of Chongming. The latter region is bounded by the Yangzi River to the north and the ocean to the east. This is the most remote part of the delta and for this reason has preserved certain folk traditions to a greater extent than other sub-regions. Bridal and funeral laments declined in other parts of the delta but were continuously transmitted here until the founding of the People's Republic. In the 1980s, laments were collected from Fengxian, Shanghai, and Chuansha, but the more complete examples of lament cycles have come from the most remote region, Shuyuan, located at the southernmost tip of Nanhui.[7]

How did the "folk" themselves perceive their own community, the boundaries of their local area, and its relation to Jiangnan and elsewhere? Orally transmitted culture implicitly conveys a sense of "our place" and where it fits in with broader social and political systems.[8] As Keith Basso notes, a sense of place is "a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities. We are, in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine".[9] In the case of the Nanhui laments, images of locations, waterways, architectural forms, and objects of material culture provided cognitive tools through which the Nanhui woman experienced her connectedness to place and community. The bride imagined the social order as

a cleavage between rich and poor, educated and uneducated, between those with property and those without, between officialdom and those with no official connections. She conjured up the domains of the *niangjia* (home of her mother) and the *pojia* (home of her mother-in-law) through sharply contrasting images of residences, furniture, food, cooking equipment, clothing, household objects, notions of education, and literacy. The *niangjia* is conceived as impoverished but familiar and free, whereas the *pojia* is perceived to be wealthy and powerful, but also harsh, restrictive, and alien.

The audience observing the lament, namely the bride's own family and village community, was invited to identify with the images of deprivation and poverty presented by the lamenting bride and to share her anxieties about the *pojia,* representing the powerful reach of the state. The bride drew upon this collective grievance and spoke for her community when she celebrated the simplicity and hard toil of the rural labouring classes and heaped scorn on the "white-faced" families of the elite, with their arrogant greed, burdensome protocols, and fastidious household rules. In sympathising with the bride's construction of their community identity, the audience was invited to share her grief at expulsion from the natal home. The hyperbolic depiction of the assumed wealth and elite status of the *pojia* was unlikely to reflect the actual experience of the bride, who would rarely if ever have the chance to see firsthand the residences and life style of the Jiangnan elite, much less to marry into it. As I shall discuss in the next chapter, this implicit aspiration could hardly represent lived reality for the 'big-footed' labouring women of Shuyuan. In other words, their imagistic repertoire thus refers more to shared understandings of community identity than to likely marriage practices. The irony of the bride's poetic grievance is that, in order to realise the dream of social mobility implicit in her movement towards the *pojia,* she will have to abandon the cosy but poor surroundings of her youth and enter the domain of this feared elite.

Land and Water

In lament imagery, the most fundamental topographic feature is the boundary between land and water. The seawall *(haitang)* wards off the vast Eastern Ocean, with its threat of floods and destruction, from newly reclaimed land at places like Shuyuan. The bride knows that it is the poorest of the poor who live by the seawall. Their homes are mere shacks of reed lattice with no central timber beam. These families survive on mixed grain of rice and barley. If she is married into one of these impoverished families, then she will endure a life of hardship, but also one of relative freedom, of roaming around as she pleases. Women by the seawall spend their days "stepping in the surging tide" and plucking fresh greens by the

wayside. These are the only sort of women in the bride's world who have a physical relationship to water. The ability to pole the flat-bottomed boats used to ply the rivers and streams was an essential male skill. In order to return to see her family, the married daughter will have to rely on her brothers to take the boat and ferry her home. This is a source of great anxiety for the bride.

> My brother, when you go by boat past that place, be sure to stand up tall,
> When you reach that place, be sure to bring the boat in close.
> Don't seek dark shadowy places to hide away from me,
> Don't stick to the clumps of reeds by the bank to get away from me.
> Don't let me live like a bird in a cage, do not just pass by without seeing me.
> When I live in their prison, don't just pole by as if you do not know me.
> (On Being Carried to the Bridal Chair, 26–31)

Waterways led to a world beyond the village, but the women of Nanhui remained close to their homes and only rarely had the chance to travel. At places like Shuyuan, cottages backed onto a network of water channels. In communities without resources to manage the waterways, the reeds clumped thickly and there were few if any stone embankments (called water bridges, or *shuiqiao*) on the edge of the water channels. This made it difficult to moor boats and for women to wash rice and do laundry. The homes of the wealthy, by contrast, had many stone embankments and bridges on the waterways so it was easy to moor a boat and do household chores without getting one's feet wet. The bride complains of her *niangjia:*

> The stone pavers caked in mud is where we raise ducks,
> No sooner do you get the left foot out than your right foot sinks in.
> (Filling the Box, 18–19)

The sensory flow of water, experienced in auditory form, provides one of the bride's commonly used expressions for familiarity:

> If you live by a river, you hear the sound of water beneath,
> If you live with others, you hear the sound of people talking.
> Dear mother who raised me, do not let your heart be anxious.
> (Filling the Box, 192–193)

Here the bride reassures her mother that, just as those who live by a river become used to the sound of water rushing, so too will she adapt to her new life in the *pojia.*

Dwellings

The bride will always talk of her natal home as the home of her mother and of the home of the husband as the home of his mother. This means that through the insistence on homes as mother-homes the lamenter and her audience constantly moved within a world apparently governed by women. The two kinds of mother-home contain distinctive architectural features and contrasting codes of protocol. The *niangjia* is said to have very low roof corners *(wujiao),* that is, the roof has a steep gradient and narrow eaves compared with the more gently sloping roofs found in the homes of the affluent.[10] Woman often work outside the home close to the shelter provided by the eaves, known as the 'wall foot' *(bijiao),* but at the *niangjia* the wall foot is narrow and affords little or no protection. Beyond the thatched cottage lies the outhouse, which contains a barrel resting on a dirt floor with a wooden plank to protect against the mud. Garden plots of radish, ginger, and other crops surround the home, and ducks roam the embankments along the water channels. Although her natal home is shabby, for the bride it is cosy, familiar, and a place where she is cherished. As a young girl she is free to roam from room to room, not subject to the sorts of restrictions she believes she will suffer in the *pojia.*

The furnishings inside the natal home are basic and crude, with floors made of packed earth. Planks are placed around the bed, and it is on one of these that the bride will stand when she performs the laments. Homes of the wealthy, on the other hand, have floors of timber. The bride anticipates that she will hear an unfamiliar creaking sound when she enters the bridal chamber of the *pojia* and treads the wooden floor. In the *niangjia* stools are very tiny and made of thatch and firewood. For lighting, the homes of the poor rely on the oil lamp *(youzhan).* The kitchen stove is made of bricks of yellow clay *(huangni zaotou).* On top are two apertures or burners *(yan)* used to cook food. Resting on the top of the clay stove is a pot known as a *tangguan* (soup pot) which relies on the heat from the stove top to keep water warm.[11] The bride compares her own role to that of the *tangguan* located between the two burners, which she sees as representing her parents. By this she means that the soup pot relies on the heat from the burners to keep warm, just as she relies on her parents for support.

The common implements of daily life are rich in association for the bride. The poor eat from large enamel bowls known as "ocean bowls" *(haiyang wan)* or from "yellow-sand [earthenware] bowls" *(huangsha),* so different from the wine goblets of the rich *(jiuzhong).* The bride identifies her own person with the crude earthenware bowls and imagines the disdain with which she will be treated by the *pojia:*

In that family they seek women of impressive appearance and excellent manners.
But now they're getting this yellow earthenware bowl—common rough goods,
When what they wanted was a fine wine goblet, exquisite handiwork!
(Thanking the Matchmaker 1:143–145)

The kitchens in wealthy homes appear huge and formidable to the bride. Their stoves are ornamented with patterned tiles. A print of a fierce-looking Stove God *(zaojun gonggong)* presides over the stove.

The stove with five burners is curved and round,
On the stove are painted coloured figures.
The Stove God looks [strict] like a grandfather. . . .
How can I follow their rules in cooking rice and gruel?
If I cook too much, I will break their rules,
If I cook too little, I will show my humble birth.
(The House, 25–27, 40–42)

Wealthy homes have a huge number of chimneys, including long, foreign-style chimneys *(waiguo yancong)* with inlaid patterns. These tall chimneys send smoke straight up to Heaven, so that the Stove God has a more direct and express route to report the goings-on of the household to Heaven. This is a cause of anxiety for the bride, who will spend a lot of her married life in the kitchen watched over by the Stove God, a symbol of male authority.[12] The woks in homes of the wealthy are huge, with heavy lids that require two hands to lift. The scraper or spatula used in cooking *(chandao)* is equally huge.[13] The bride fears she will be very clumsy and rattle the implements. In the kitchens of the rich one finds a chopstick holder with ivory or lacquer chopsticks, and silken towels hang from gleaming hooks. But in her natal home one can only see thin bamboo chopsticks *(maozhu kuai)*. The pojia has a range of willow baskets *(kaolao)* much larger than those the bride is used to. She feels very unsure about how to use these formidable baskets. Their rattan dippers *(tengdou)* are huge. The homes of the affluent have "pearl lamps" *(zhudeng)*, which are actually gasoline lamps introduced to the region in the late nineteenth century.[14] The furniture is described in hyperbolic terms as tables of marble and footstools of ivory.

Unlike the homes of the *niangjia,* the *pojia* is able to provide segregated space for men and women in line with Confucian proprieties.[15] The *pojia* "has ten wings on the side and nine courtyards" *(shi dai jiu ting)*, a common saying in this area, with separate halls for women to weave cloth and do sewing. These fine homes are surrounded by bamboo groves, orchards, and vegetable fields. Behind the residence are sturdy stone embankments by the water canals with protective railings where women wash clothing.

Sometimes the *pojia* is described as being the type found in market townships of the region. In neighbouring Datuan, for example, homes were commonly built around an enclosed courtyard known as *jiaoquan.*[16] Another style of town residence referred to by the bride had two storeys, and their women are referred to as "women of the upper apartments" *(loushang ren),* conveying a notion of refined gentility. These affluent town women stand in contrast to "women from the coast" *(haili ren).* The *pojia* is said to have thick brick walls, black lacquered rafters, deep eaves, and a broad 'wall foot', to provide shelter for domestic duties.

Clothing

Costume was a significant mark of social position. Men and women from commoner families in Nanhui wore cotton jackets, trousers, and an apron at the waist.[17] Clothing was made from the ubiquitous *lanbu* or blue cotton cloth for which the region is known. The rural population wore sandals of rushes *(puxie)* or of straw *(caoxie).* In summer, women wore a cloth wrapped around their bosoms called a stomacher.[18] The bride describes men from the *pojia* as wearing long mandarin jackets *(magua)* and "jade-white long shirts". *Pojia* women are said to wear "alluring clothing" *(hunqi yishang)*—a disparaging term referring to 'meat' as distinct from the simpler, 'vegetarian' style the bride is used to.

The size of one's sleeves was an important signifier of social status. Full long sleeves *(changxiu)* allowed for solemn bowing, with sleeves twirling. The *pojia* men have sleeves so big that they roll up them up. When the bride is married into this wealthy family, her father will have to make his sleeves much larger to maintain face when he goes to visit the *pojia* at New Year. Later, she taunts her father about how humiliating it will be when he goes to pay his respects to a family of this lofty status: "From now on you will have to swing your sleeves [in humility] when you bow to them at New Year. / Make your clothing bigger, the better to make yourself small!" (Thanks to the Father, 65–66).

Food, Cooking, and Domestic Work

The bride alludes to the sacrifices her family made in stinting on their food in order to provide her with a good dowry. The staple food of the poor is rice *(fan)* when they can afford it and gruel *(zhou)* when times are hard. At times of famine they may eat mixed grains *(maixi)* rather than the usual staples.[19] The *niangjia* can only afford to eat weak soup *(tangshui)* and fish. The latter is very common and hence cheap. Other foods commonly mentioned include the winter melon, sugarcane, watermelons, and sweet potato. Salted meat was eaten only on special occa-

sions. Festival food included meat dumplings *(huntun)* and sticky rice dumplings *(yuanzi),* which were prepared at New Year. The bride says that her grandfather loves her so much he serves these delicacies to her first rather than to the seniors in the family.[20] The *pojia,* on the other hand, is able to eat pork and goat, salted and fresh meat, eggs, chicken, 'five-flavoured pork', sea cucumber, dried prawns, and crab claws. They 'bribe' the matchmaker by offering her rich food and noodle dishes *(xianfen)*. At the summer solstice, *pojia* women wrap up the sticky rice in four-pointed palm leaves *(si ye zongtou)*.

In households, it was generally the daughters-in-law who cooked for everyone. This is one of the chief anxieties of the departing bride. She will have to get up early, as soon as the cock crows, go to the kitchen, open the heavy door of the grate, and light the fire in order to prepare the first meal of the day for the family. In the *pojia* everything will be on a much larger scale than the bride is used to. She will surely find it difficult to work in a kitchen with so many burners and such a large number of woks. Some woks are so heavy she will need two hands to lift them. The measures for grain and pots to steam rice are also huge. How will she be strong enough to wield such large spatulas and scoops?

When the meal is ready, she will be expected to greet the senior members of the family in turn. Her cooking skills will be on display, and she is likely to fall far short of their demands. They will compare her dishes with those of the senior sister-in-law, who cooks superbly and can make even simple fare taste like banquet food (her gruel tastes like sweet dates, her bean curd like salted meat). The brothers-in-law, in particular, will compare her household skills to those of the other married women. It will be difficult to cook rice to suit the differing tastes of her parents-in-law. They will expect that each grain of rice should retain its own distinctive shape once cooked, expressed as "each grain should have ten edges and nine corners". Comically, the bride declares: "But the rice I make has grass and seeds in it./In the bottom are river snails,/In the middle the rice is raw" (The House, 61–63).

Rice was husked by women using a mortar and pestle. The verb "to grind" *(chong)* is used metaphorically by the bride to bemoan her inadequacies. She fears she will not fit into her new home, never be able to "blend" with her in-laws, unlike rice that is husked and made ready to cook. Nor will she be able to cope with heavy duties such as carrying burdens using bamboo poles. The senior sister-in-law of the groom (Dama), on the other hand, has "shoulders of bronze and a waist of iron". It is intriguing that the Dama is presented sometimes as a labourer of heroic proportions and at other times as a "white-faced", educated lady who spends her time on embroidery. This contradiction comes from the nature of the inherited formulaic repertoire. The *pojia* is necessarily described as very wealthy but the reality of the bride's situation is that she will marry into a family of similar or only slightly higher economic status.

Education and Literacy

About 70 percent of the population of Nanhui before 1949 was illiterate.[21] Female literacy was very low in this region in the early twentieth century and before. Indeed, lamenters I met in Nanhui were described as illiterate ("of low cultural level"). But the bride is very aware of the advantage of literacy and its association with the upper class. Educated people at the *pojia* "have pointed tongues", that is, they are eloquent and able to engage in social intercourse with important people outside the home. They also have "pointed fingers" and know how to write (Filling the Box, 188–189). Wealthy families prefer brides from Suzhou who have tightly bound feet, fine figures, and are educated ("white-faced women who read books", *lianbai shusheng dushu ren;* Thanking the Matchmaker 1:118–120). The *pojia* women is a "pale-faced scholar with a melon-shaped face" compared with the bride of the poor, whose face "is yellow [sallow] like a cucumber slice" (On the Bridal Sedan, 143–144).The same expression is used as a general term of praise, even when it clearly does not refer to education. For example, the bride, when thanking the ritual specialist termed here the Fortunate Woman, will praise her as a "white-faced scholar" *(mianbai shushing)*. As she departs from her natal home, the bride declares her hope that her brother will take the imperial examinations (abolished in 1905). As for her nephew, she envisages him as learning how to write characters and read the basic primers, such as the *Thousand Character Classic* and the *Hundred Surnames.* These comments about her brothers hardly refer to their actual situation, since one can assume that they are destined to spend their days toiling in the fields like her father, but rather to the grand myth of Chinese civilization—the pursuit of a classical education and participation in the lottery of the imperial examination system.

The World Outside the Village

In oral traditions, place-names and locations embed a symbolic 'map' of the perceived environment, evoking memories and understandings of social networks.[22] For the Nanhui bride, the names of places she has never been to and is most unlikely to visit in her lifetime became familiar to her from the lament repertoire. These place-names summon up images of the marketplace, the imperial examinations, official power, the affluence of the elite, and the strange cultural forms associated with unimaginable "other countries" *(waiguo)*. The main area outside Shuyuan that she recognizes is Datuan. Shuyuan is linked to Datuan by a waterway that until the contemporary era provided its primary link to the outside world.[23] By the late nineteenth century Datuan was a significant marketing centre

for cotton goods. It was the place where the family went shopping for necessities and, most important, for goods for the bride's dowry. One travelled by boat to Datuan, crossing the numerous wooden and stone bridges that criss-cross the town, some of which remained in the late 1990s. The bride marvels at the crowded residences of Datuan, where narrow houses stand in rows face-to-face across tiny lanes. How different this was to her village home, set in isolation along the edge of the water channels!

Datuan plays a large part in the bride's construction of 'her place', and lament rhetoric is suffused with imagery drawn from the marketplace. The bride often speaks of the weighing scales, or *cheng*. This consisted of a pole with a hook for the object to be weighed at one end and a weight hung with string from a nail set in the pole. The relative position of the nail along the pole determined the balance and accuracy of the scales. The bride used this notion to refer to anything fixed and certain; for example, her family name was fixed like the nail on a pair of scales. She was aware that even when married, she would retain the family name of her birth, and in this way always be marked as not belonging to the patriline of her husband. Similarly, she declares that she was born stupid, a fact as certain as the nail banged into the measuring scales.[24] She even describes herself as "discounted goods" (*zhetou huo;* Thanking the Father, 58).

The women of Shuyuan rarely travelled to Datuan, but the men of the family regularly went there to purchase necessities such as oil, salt, soy sauce, and vinegar. In lament rhetoric, it is the bride's older brother *(ajiu)* who goes shopping. He brings back valuable goods for her dowry: cassia-scented soap, clam oil *(halu you)* used to protect the hands in cold weather, engraved knives, durable combs made from the hard outer cuticle of bamboo, and needles of various sizes—long needles for making coverlets and sheets and fine needles for fine "sesame" stitches used in sewing clothing. The bride hopes he will also buy her fancy blouses and jackets to add to the show, and hence the family's reputation:

> Brother, you went to Datuan with an empty basket, but came back with a full one.
> You bought small goods and food to take home,
> Brother, when you bought cassia-scented soap you cajoled the shop-seller to add a little more,
> You brought four ounces of clam oil,
> And two pairs of engraved knives. . . .
> You bought so much my brother's name is famous throughout the town of Datuan!
> (On Being Carried to the Bridal Chair, 44, 51–54, 57)

The bride is also aware of the significance of Nanhui town, the county seat of Nanhui (now known as Huinan), although there are no signs in the lament repertoire that she has visited this area. Generally young women barely travelled

beyond their village, so the bride's knowledge of Nanhui town would be largely from hearsay. She is aware of the thick city walls, which were not destroyed until 1966. The God of the City Walls also features in her imagination; she likens her mother-in-law to the Wife of the City God *(Chenghuang nainai)*. In the nineteenth century, a temple to the City God was located in Nanhui township.[25] The bride is in awe of the magistrate of Nanhui; her father-in-law will surely be as angry as this magistrate.

The distant city of Shanghai is mentioned in laments only as a centre of commerce. The bride notes that the *saosao* (her older brother's wife) has produced excellent-quality cotton cloth that will be sold in Shanghai. When they are wealthy, they will surely buy land in Shanghai. The lack of references to Shanghai other than as a place to sell bolts of cloth could indicate that the typical bride of the sands communities of this era (late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries) had never been to this metropolis. However, the bride is dimly aware of her location east of the Huangpu River, and talks of families who have won fame throughout the Huangpu region (Filling the Box, 185). She has also heard of famed places in Jiangnan, such as Nanjing, where she envisages her brother going to take the imperial exams (A Bowl of Rice, 11). Suzhou, the largest city in Jiangnan in the later imperial era, is known to her as the place where the wealthy seek brides (Thanking the Matchmaker 1:118). She believes that the wealthy homes have stone bridges curved like Lake Taihu, located in the Jiangnan hinterland (The Bridal Boat, 48). At the outermost reaches of her known world lies Yunnan in southwest China. When they are wealthy they will buy land stretching as far away as remote Yunnan (A Bowl of Rice, 55).

The Imperial System and Western Penetration

The bride constructs the *pojia* in line with her understandings of the power of the elite and officialdom in imperial times. In this way, the power of the state, remote and shadowy as it would appear in this part of Nanhui, is given concrete expression. Her received knowledge appears to derive less from the Republican era of the 1920s, which is when Pan Cailian learnt her *kujia* repertoire as a young girl, than from the final decades of the imperial period (mid-nineteenth century to 1911). For example, the *pojia* was regarded as belonging to the world of "tribute rice" *(caoliang mifan)*. Their strict household protocols are feared as "rule by officials" *(guan zuo zhu)*. The bride construes the *pojia* as having marital ties with noble and official families *(huangdi guanjia)*. The anger of the senior men in the *pojia* will be like the rage of Security Group Heads who collected rent during the late imperial and early Republican era (*baozheng* officials).[26] The emperor features only once in the lament cycle translated here. In the final blessing to her family (A

Bowl of Rice), she envisages the emperor as smiling on the family and rewarding them. He appears as a benign presence, in contrast to the haughty arrogance of officialdom.[27]

By the late nineteenth century, notions of the foreign had subtly influenced the lament repertoire of Nanhui. The lower Yangzi delta was one of the first areas to be affected by the Opium Wars and British incursions into the area from the 1840s. By the early 1900s, steamships linked east of the Huangpu to Shanghai and modern factories were set up in Zhoupu in western Nanhui.[28] Missionaries were active in the Nanhui area in the early twentieth century. Western penetration led to an influx of Western goods, some of which became a fashionable part of the bride's dowry. In her laments, the Nanhui bride referred to various foreign items in circulation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as foreign cloth *(yangbu)* and foreign silver dollars *(bai yangtian)*. The dowries of wealthy families included fancy foreign-style cases with "butterfly hinges" *(hudie jiaolian)* that open on the side. The bridal sedan chair is enclosed on three sides with panes of "Western glass" *(xiyang jing),* a term for glass with colourful patterns. The splendid bridal boat is likened to "a foreign dark hat with a big red crown" which appears to be a top hat *(yang qing maozi, da hong ding)*. As mentioned earlier, the homes of the wealthy are said to have long 'foreign chimneys' that provide the Stove God with an express route to Heaven to report on wrongdoings.

* * *

In the folk imagination of illiterate women of the sands communities, the mighty world of Jiangnan, with its flourishing commerce, wealthy refined families, prosperous urban centres, and growing links to the world economy, was compressed into the confines of the coastal region of Shuyuan and a single market town, Datuan. It is the architecture, food, objects, and products of this region that are summoned up in a host of vivid images in the lament repertoire. In her lament, the bride validates the heroic toil of the sands people and their stoic and good-humoured response to the harsh circumstances of their existence. She lovingly depicts the houses, landscape, foods, utensils, and goods of everyday life, particularly the cotton products of women's labour, and infuses these humble goods with symbolic richness. Beyond Datuan lies a largely chimerical world, dismissed in stereotypical phrases, such as "Suzhou, where the white-faced brides come from".

Representatives of the Chinese state—the *baozheng* officials, tribute tax, and the emperor—were mere shadowy images to tenant cultivators at Shuyuan, whose contact was with the landlord, not the tax collector. However, for the bride the power of the state was made concrete and immediate through the imaginary of the *pojia*. It was through recognition of the 'true' nature of the *pojia* that she became chillingly aware of the inadequacies of her own community. Her people lacked an

understanding of the protocols of the elite, and she would be sure to meet with cold-eyed disapproval.

In spite of the elaborate charade enacted in the bridal lament, the 'big-footed' women of Shuyuan were not in the running for the hypergamous contest that saw women compete to raise their status in life through marriage. Nonetheless, the aspiration to social mobility continues as a powerful motif throughout the lament. It forms the 'intended' or implicit meaning of her performance in spite of the bride's protestations of scorn for the wealthy. The dualistic imagery of the *niangjia* and *pojia,* of the exchange of the bride between one mother-home and another, allows the bride to mediate the tension between loyalty to the sands community of her birth and the possibility of a rise in status through hypergamous marriage. In other words, the bride celebrates the distance of her community from the harsh rigors of Confucian protocols and the 'white-faced' literacy of the elite while at the same time imagining herself about to enter its portals through the domain of the *pojia.* This is an imagined world where the impoverished coastal fringe is not at the periphery of Jiangnan but at its very centre.

CHAPTER 2

The People of the Sands

Even a slattern will be sure to find her match,
No lazy woman will wind up in the pile of ash.
—Nanhui saying[1]

For a woman living in Shuyuan, the centre of her world was the saline land by the sea wall, where only cotton would grow. It was to this region that her forebears had migrated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to toil as tenant labourers on land painfully reclaimed from silt left deposited at the very mouth of the ocean. The populations who migrated to the coast came to be known as "people of the sands" and formed a distinctive sub-group marked by relative deprivation. The labour of coastal women in spinning and weaving cotton was of crucial importance to the commodity economy of Jiangnan in the late imperial era. Due to marriage customs and local demographics, the poorest men were often unable to find brides and women were highly prized in the marriage market. As the above saying indicates, virtually all women were married, even those who were handicapped or slatternly.

A History of the Nanhui Region

The area now known popularly as Pudong (or east of the Huangpu River) emerged gradually from the floodplain of the Yangzi and Qiantang Rivers during the last millennium. In the eighth century CE, the settlement of Zhoupu, now located in the far west of Nanhui county, marked the sea wall by the coast.[2] Over the centuries, the land east of Zhoupu was gradually reclaimed from the sea for farming. The sea wall, marking the edge of the reclaimed land, has been rebuilt several times since the eighth century to allow for the expansion of territory.[3]

This region of rivers, plains, and sand was very thinly populated until the

fall of the Northern Song to the Jurchen invaders in the twelfth century, when literati families fled to the region of Zhoupu. Saltworks were established in the tenth century and salt production was to remain the major industry until the sixteenth century.[4] By the early fourteenth century, the saltworks at Xiasha employed around 15,700 male workers, whose dependents came to settle in the region.[5] It was at this time that the area became a part of Shanghai County in Songjiang Prefecture, an administrative status it retained until the late nineteenth century. Today one can still find place-names containing the term *zao,* or furnace, the original names of the historical saltworks. It was during the Ming *longqing* era (1567–1572) that the saltworks were arranged into larger units called *tuan.*[6] This is the origin of townships such as Datuan, which looms large in the lament cycle discussed here. With the expansion of silt over the centuries, the original saltworks gradually moved farther and farther away from the sea. The salt industry went into gradual decline by the late eighteenth century, to be replaced in importance by the cotton industry. One major legacy of the salt industry was the network of waterways constructed around major saltworks. As salt declined in importance, the waterways were enlarged and used for crop irrigation.[7]

The coastal region became of increasing strategic importance to the empire, which sought to guard against incursions by Japanese pirates. In 1386 the first Ming emperor built a walled township called Nanhui (the modern county town of Huinan) and garrisoned troops there. In Huinan today one can still visit the Drum Tower and view the giant drum used to alert the populace of an imminent attack. By the late Ming, the famed commander Qi Jiguang (1528–1588) trained troops in Datuan, which was then located on the edge of the sea wall. The high Qing period saw the expansion of Nanhui and an elevation of its status. By 1726 the number of male heads of families in Nanhui County was determined to be 44,102.[8] In the same year the region east of the Huangpu River was defined for the first time as Nanhui, or "southern convergence", which refers to the meeting of the Yangzi and Qiantang Rivers. It was at this time that a Confucius temple complex, including a training school for local candidates taking the imperial examinations, was built within the walls of Nanhui township. Other historical sites remaining in the present day include temples and stages for opera performances.

The first edition of the *Nanhui County Gazetteer* (1879) recorded the main crops as rice paddy, soybeans, cotton, wheat, and barley.[9] Rice was grown in "wet" (irrigated) fields, and cotton and soybeans in "dry" (unirrigated) fields. In areas distant from the Huangpu River, peasants pulled water carts and ladled water to rice paddy.[10] In coastal areas, cotton was more profitable than rice. For this reason the region was not always self-sufficient in this staple food. If the local harvest was not adequate to feed the population, then people had to wait until peddlers came from Suzhou and Changshu. In times of natural disaster the price of grain skyrocketed, causing considerable hardship.[11]

The *Gazetteer* also noted the inconvenient transport of the area. The Huangpu River formed a barrier to the north of the region and prevented the emerging city of Shanghai from exerting a gravitational pull until the early twentieth century. Within Nanhui the major marketing towns of Zhoupu, Xinchang, and Datuan were linked by waterways. Paddlewheel steamers began to ply the Huangpu from 1914, but roads were not built until 1921.[12] Even in the 1930s and 1940s, the route from the southernmost tip of Nanhui to Shanghai, including a ferry trip over the Huangpu River, took several days:

> Before Liberation you had to walk to Datuan and Nicheng, you could not go by boat. We only had small boats anyway and to go from here to Datuan by boat would involve a lot of twists and turns. People said there were seventy-two bends, it was simply not convenient. For this reason there was nothing for it but to walk. We used boats mainly to transport goods; villagers usually did not travel by boat. (Wang Xinda from Miaogang on the south coast of Nanhui, male, born 1931)

> Before Liberation, the only thing we could travel on was small earthen roads. At that time there were no vehicles, we relied utterly on what we could bear and carry. The pole carrier was a tool of transport. There was a path from Guoyuan town to Nicheng. There was another path along the Tang River from Lindong through to Laogang. These were the main walkways. It took forty-five minutes to get to Nicheng and half a day to Laogang. If you went to Laogang you had to leave early because it took three hours to get to Datuan. The return journey took six hours on foot. It was nine *li* to Nicheng and thirty *li* to Datuan. (Sheng Fuxiang from Miaogang, male, born 1928) [13]

In the late nineteenth century, the Shuyuan community to which Pan Cailian belonged comprised mostly tenant farmers, like most of the Nanhui population. The area had a complex pattern of land tenure with land worked by three different groups: cultivator-owners, tenants, and tenants who were part owners. During the 1880s, between 50 and 60 percent of peasants in some parts of Songjiang were tenant farmers on small holdings. Large land holdings in coastal Jiangnan, including Nanhui and the adjacent region of Fengxian, were rare.[14] By 1934 in Nanhui, 58 percent of farmers were tenant farmers, 27 percent part owners part tenants, and 15 percent cultivator-owners. Nanhui had a significantly higher tenancy level than the neighbouring counties of Qingpu (46 percent tenancy) and Chuansha (5 percent tenancy).[15] Most of the Nanhui tenants had been brought in from poor regions such as Chongming Island or directly north of the Yangzi in the region known as Subei. They worked newly reclaimed land along the expanding sea wall purchased by affluent land developers from nearby townships.

Tenant farmers did not pay state taxes, and for this reason had less to do with the state than owner-cultivators, but they could be asked to pay 40 percent or

more of their harvest to the landlord. They would make a down payment to the value of one year of rent (known as *ya zu mi*) which was usually handed over at the time of the tenth lunar month along with gifts of chickens to the landlord. If the harvest was depleted by droughts, floods, insects, and pestilence, then the family would be bankrupted and have no option but to leave the land and go begging.[16] Wang Xinda reported that before 1949 his family rented a total of 20 *mu* of land. They paid the landlord 40 *jin* of cotton out of a total harvest of 60 *jin.* This family was more impoverished than most, "because our mother died and we had no one at home to weave cloth".[17] Another longtime resident of Miaogang, Mao Huoying (female, born 1924), confirmed that her family paid half of the harvest in rent. "When hungry we went to the landlord, to the *baozhang*[18] or wealthy peasants to borrow food. Generally we wouldn't go to our relatives, who were also very poor. If we borrowed one hundred *jin* of rice then we had to repay one hundred and fifty the following year." [19]

The lamenting bride imagines the *pojia* as "people of property" *(cai zhuren jia)* or "those who serve as officials in the yamen" (*zuoguan zuofu,* On the Bridal Sedan, 106) or, simply, as "people of influence" (*shi sheng da,* The House, 9). This reflects her understanding of the affluent elite of Jiangnan. In her lament, wealthy households have large land holdings surrounded by water. For this reason, they are able to grow paddy rice, including *nuomi* sticky rice used in festival foods (Filling the Box, 14, 73–74). Her imagery implies a hierarchy of wet land (irrigated), associated with the production of paddy rice, and dry land (unirrigated) used for growing cotton. Truly wealthy households hire others to cultivate their own land. They do not grow cotton but nonetheless wear fine clothing, presumably purchased (Filling the Box, 71). If they hold a government post then they lease a sizable property of "official land". The bride expresses her fear of the *pojia* in terms derived from her understandings of the operations of the Chinese state:

> If I want to return home on my own, it's difficult to leave.
> It will be like eating "tribute rice" or "ruled by officials".
> When you follow the path of officialdom, there is the law of officials to control you.
> (Filling the Box, 49–51)

The *pojia* are cruel and avaricious: "They are a family of great wealth, with [greedy] bulging eyes" (Filling the Box, 67). They enjoy affluence without labouring in the fields: "In their family, even though they do not eat tribute grain [serve as officials] they still eat well;/Although they do not sow cotton seeds, they still wear good clothing" (Filling the Box, 70–71). She expects to endure harsh discipline and physical punishment like a criminal of the state: "I will pass my days in future as if living in prison" (Filling the Box, 157). The mother echoes these images of the wealth of the *pojia:* "We have given you to a family of property./They

are like muskmelon tendrils climbing up bamboo groves [that is, well connected]" (Filling the Box, 78–79). A constant refrain of both mother and daughter is that, at the *pojia,* "they have strict rules and many ceremonies" (*guiju da lai lishu duo;* Filling the Box, 167–171).

Social Order and the State

The bride depicts a state in tight control of its subjects through the operations of the affluent and powerful families of her area, who cling to their official connections like muskmelon tendrils on bamboo. However, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a time of severe social breakdown in China, and Nanhui was no exception. The fact that Nanhui relied on imports from Suzhou and Changshu for rice made it particularly vulnerable to grain shortage in times of civil disturbance or natural disaster. *Nanhui xian zhi* (1879) reported that government reserves were not enough to feed the hungry and "troublemakers" took advantage of the social unrest to accuse others of wrongdoing and bring court charges.[20] "Vagrants" (unemployed labourers) came around in groups to steal the harvest. Farmers and tenants defended their fields, sometimes to the death.[21] Other unemployed males hung around in taverns, engaging in fisticuffs or setting up brotherhood associations.[22] Bands of salt smugglers fought amongst each other and with the local government.[23] Opium smoking was very prevalent and had spread from urban to rural areas. The value of raw opium entering the region daily was said to be greater than the value of rice produced. Opium dens attracted the sons of fine families, and officialdom could do nothing to put a stop to it.[24]

Local elites could do little to arrest the decline of law and order. Successive gazetteers depicted the area as backward with a recalcitrant population, one that was hard to govern along Neo-Confucian lines. Even the gentry-scholar class *(shidafu)* were described as indolent, fond of litigation and of forming factions.[25] By the 1920s bands of ruffians roamed the countryside at will:

> On the western boundary of Nanhui scoundrels [*guntu,* a term used commonly for unmarried and unemployed men] form groups to cause trouble; ruffians oppress those from good families. If you utter a word of disagreement they will form a group of several hundred men and carry out retribution against the vulnerable of law-abiding families. These hold back their tears and swallow their words, not daring to argue with them. (*Nanhui xian xu zhi,* 1929)[26]

One elderly resident of Laogang by the coast recalled that when his family moved to Laogang the whole area was still wasteland. They had lived in a thatched

hut and earned a precarious living by reclaiming land and cultivating cotton, beans, and wheat, each harvest threatened by tidal floods from the ocean. This was a region beyond the reach of the state, and the peasant communities had little contact with the townships of Nicheng and Datuan. Thieves roamed the coastal marshes and wastelands in the early twentieth century:

> When my daughter was young, I went to the ocean's edge to get some crabs to sell at Nicheng in return for some rice, but in the evening bandits stole my goods. I remember when I had just gotten married, the entire dowry from the Subei area was stolen by bandits and the bride and I were tied up. They came to our house and seized the goods; they just came in the evening—our mouths were stuffed with towels. (Xu Min from Miaogang, male, born 1910) [27]

The theft of dowries was a common occurrence. Zhu Baogen (male from Xiasha, born 1923) gave this account of what happened to his family in an interview in the 1990s:

> After I got married, brigands *(tufei)* pillaged my home on two occasions. They were all in disguise, I couldn't see their faces clearly; they wore black clothing, just like on television. When the *tufei* came I led the family out to flee. If we stayed at home we'd just get beaten up, or they would use fire to burn you. I don't know how much they managed to steal. At that time we had nothing worth stealing, we only kept grain at home, so they stole our grain. On one occasion they made off with over ten *dan* of grain. The Japanese only stole chickens, but the *tufei* stole everything.[28]

Protests against rents and taxes became endemic in nineteenth-century Jiangnan.[29] Between 1851 and 1911 there were nine uprisings and disturbances in Nanhui alone, most of them protesting government taxes or extortion by officialdom. Local officials used taxes to pay their expenses and took bribes to waive government imposts. In 1893 desperate raids on supplies of rice involved over ten thousand Nanhui people.[30]

The Changing Demography of Nanhui

The region east of the Huangpu saw three major migration movements before the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. The first period was in the twelfth century at the time of the fall of the Northern Song, when northern literati and gentry families fled to the south. The descendants of these people comprise a large proportion of the population of the areas west of modern-day Xiasha (to the

south of Zhoupu). Another migratory surge took place during the Yuan period (1271–1368), when there was an influx of labourers to work on the rapidly developing saltworks centered on Xiasha and Xinchang.[31] During the Ming and Qing periods the regions of Shanghai, Fengxian, Chuansha, and Nanhui all belonged to one identifiable linguistic group, an indication of the relative homogeneity of the population.[32] This was to change by the late Qing and early Republican periods. When the sea wall was moved farther east, some wealthy families from Jiangsu Province and elsewhere moved into the area and became leading landholders in the region. Many of these resided in the southern township of Datuan. Leading families such as Sheng, Shao, Ma, Wang, Xu, Gong, Huang, and Xi hired labourers from impoverished areas to reclaim the salty land for farming. This period marked the third migratory wave in the region. Poor families from Qidong and Haimen on the northern reach of the Yangzi River, and from Chongming Island at the mouth of the Yangzi, began to colonize the saline soil by the Nanhui coast. These migrants were part of a vast outward flow of people from the impoverished Subei region (north of the Yangzi) to Shanghai and environs.[33] These migrating communities on reclaimed coastal land came to be known as Dasha ren ("people from the great sands") or, more simply, as *sha min* ("people of the sands"). The people of the sands comprise a large proportion of the population of the southeastern coastal regions such as Laogang, Xingang, Donghai, and Shuyuan and account for the linguistic complexity of the area, which mixes a northern Shanghai dialect with a southern one.[34] This population lived in continual hock to shops in Datuan for their everyday supplies. As the author of the *Nanhui xian xuzhi* (1929) pointed out, the fact that businesses in Datuan had overtaken Zhoupu and Xinchang in profitability was due to the improvidence of "the people of the sands":

> The people of the sands who till the fields are by nature rough and crude. They do deals in the markets and shops, placing complete faith in their prospective harvests. From spring to autumn they acquire all their food and daily goods from the shops on credit. When the harvest appears in autumn, they exhaust all their earnings in paying off their debt, without even bothering to take note of profit or loss. The soil by the sea is fertile and has had good harvests for successive years. The people of the sands have enough to eat and to get themselves drunk, and so the shops make double the amount of interest. For this reason [Datuan businesses] have accumulated substantial capital, much more than merchants in other townships.[35]

Unlike more settled populations, these migratory coastal communities lived on the edge of destitution:

> It is only the guest workers *(kemin)* by the coast opening up new land for cultivation who don't know how to accumulate wealth. If their harvest is good, they indulge in

drink and gambling until their resources are depleted and then, finding themselves without clothing and food, they roam about the highways and byways.[36]

It is "the people of the sands" who form the 'folk community' in which bridal laments circulate in Nanhui. Pan Cailian came from Shuyuan, which is now a district *(xiang)* in the southeast corner of Nanhui, located fifteen kilometres from the county seat of Huinan. This area became land only in the eighteenth century.[37] The name Shuyuan (Academy), a curiously learned name for an area populated by poor tenant labourers, derives from an organisation owned by an academy in Huinan called the Huinan Shuyuan gongchan. In the late nineteenth century this group sought to invest in the region by employing people to reclaim the soil and convert it into cultivable land. In 1985 the population of Shuyuan comprised 22,998 people, a lower population density than in western Nanhui and the Yangzi delta generally.[38] The reason for the lower population was the relative lack of irrigation water, the salinity of the reclaimed land, and consequent low production levels. Women of the sands communities tilled the fields together with their men, and spun yarn and wove cloth for additional cash income. In an area that historically had a chronic shortage of women, the labouring wives of Shuyuan had a definite market value.

Census records of the whole Nanhui population, as distinct from male heads of families, began to be kept only in 1790. At this time Nanhui had a population just short of 450,000. The state reconstruction efforts in the decades after the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864) saw a surge in the Nanhui population, as elsewhere in Songjiang Prefecture, reaching 667,514 by 1874 (see Table 1). However, there was a marked decline after 1881,[39] and by 1909 the population had fallen to the level of

Table 1 Male-female ratios in the historical demography of Nanhui

Period	Total population	Males	Females	Male to female ratio
1790	448,338	240,804	207,534	116:100
1816	416,497	224,461	192,036	116:100
1862	487,666	265,341	222,325	119:100
1874	667,514	342,601	324,913	105:100
1909	406,674	206,499	200,175	103:100
1931	482,107	239,814	242,293	98:100
1944	528,751	248,017	280,734	88:100
1946	527,940	257,540	270,400	92:100
1947	513,867	237,147	276,720	85:100
1948	519,270	241,724	277,546	87:100

Source: The first four columns derive from *Nanhui xianzhi,* 1992, 114, table of Nanhui historical population). The fifth column is adduced from the other data.

a century before. The Taiping Rebellion, which led to the death of millions, had a more limited effect in Nanhui and the Songjiang region generally due to the intervention of foreign forces based in Shanghai.[40] Taiping forces took over a residence belonging to a leading family in northern Nanhui County and destroyed part of the Confucian temple complex in the county seat of Nanhui (modern Huinan).[41] In the decades after the Taiping Rebellion, communities whose livelihood had been destroyed shifted to areas like Nanhui that had been less affected.

There were a number of reasons for the severe decline in the Nanhui population after the 1880s. This period saw the setting up of European cotton mills, the consequent decline of the native cotton industry due to the rise of industrial textiles in Shanghai, the increasing hardships of tenant farmers due to rising rent levels, civil disturbances, and a series of natural disasters, including catastrophic flooding. By the early twentieth century, the introduction of Western mechanisation led to a sharp decline in the local cotton industry. Cotton seeds from the United States were introduced in 1913 into Pudong in northern Nanhui, which led to a rise in cotton production in areas that used the foreign seeds. However, less advanced areas could not compete and suffered accordingly.[42]

Although China's population as a whole more than doubled from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, this population explosion did not occur in the Jiangnan region, due to agricultural constraints. Brenner and Isett point to "a near demographic standstill after 1750" in the delta region, which, they believe, was due to an inability to increase agricultural production and hence land division amongst sons. They note further that life expectancy in Jiangnan declined in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For example, in Jiangsu Province, "male life expectancy at age 15 fell from about 54 years to 38".[43] The equivalent figures for Nanhui are not known, but Elvin calculated that, for Jiaxing, a coastal region to the south of Nanhui, the life expectancy for Jiaxing women at birth was between eighteen and twenty-four years. These women actually had a lower life expectancy than those in less 'advanced' areas due to "the high stress under which they lived".[44]

Lower life expectancy could help to account for certain unusual aspects of the Nanhui kinship system. These include the prominence of the senior brother rather than the parents in deciding the size of the bride's dowry; the importance of the senior brother rather than the parents in maintaining ongoing ties with the daughter once she is married; and the prevalence of adoptive mothers (known as *jiniang*) to support the role of the natural mother. The *jiniang* was a woman of the village who would show an interest in the welfare of the child in the event of the death of the parents. A typical *jiniang* would also participate in the preparation for the young daughter's marriage, and one stage of the bridal lament is addressed to her. One could interpret these practices as adaptations of the traditional kinship system designed to provide protection for the younger generation in a society with high mortality rates.

Kinship and Marriage in Nanhui

In Nanhui, as in other parts of the lower Yangzi delta, kinship arrangements were divided between elite groups who had "organized lineages", and the peasantry, who belonged to "more loosely organized descent groups".[45] In the case of the people of the sands, populations from various areas in Subei mingled in the newly reclaimed land of the coastal communities. Mostly illiterate, they did not set up lineage structures with genealogies and close connections to the gentry-scholar class, as in some other parts of the delta. The poor migratory communities brought with them the typical patrilineal configurations common to Han Chinese populations generally. For example, the Nanhui laments reveal a construction of the family that is divided between paternal and maternal sides, with the latter being placed first in esteem. The mother enunciates the family hierarchy at the end of the first stage of the lament cycle by instructing her daughter on the correct order in which she is to "thank" each member of the family. This rank order runs from the paternal senior to the maternal seniors—that is, from her father, paternal grandparents, paternal uncles, and aunts to her maternal grandparents, maternal uncles, and aunts. In this way the bride enacts the kinship hierarchy through her very performance.

An intriguing exception to the patrilineal norm is the importance of the mother's oldest brother *(niangjiu)* and the bride's older brother *(age* or *ajiu)*, who play an important protective role in the life of their maternal nieces and nephews. The relative importance of the role of the brother of the bride in the kinship system has also been noted in Taiwan[46] and in contemporary Shanghai County.[47] The bride relied on her older brother rather than her father to continue to protect her after her marriage. The brother would be assumed to outlive his parents, and so the bride places her hopes of ongoing care in the *gege* (older brother) and his wife *(saosao)*. This brother will become a *niangjiu* in turn to her own children. Both the *ajiu* and the *niangjiu* are important for the lamenting bride, who begs her *ajiu* to visit her often in order to enhance her status with the groom's family (Filling the Box, 158). She hopes the *ajiu* will invite her to return home at the autumn harvest and the spring festival at the year's end. It is also the *ajiu* who gives final approval to the items in the dowry, first displayed around her room and then wrapped in boxes and barrels. In this duty he is assisted by his wife, the *saosao*. The *ajiu* will also attend the wedding banquet at the groom's house. The bride begs him to come early. She imagines there will be all sorts of dangers: it will be dark, the brother will travel with a lantern, he may be bitten by the guard dogs, or intimidated by the stone lions at the entrance. If her brother visits her often, then he will be seen as her protector and her status in the groom's home will be enhanced ("they will beat me less").

Because of the *ajiu*'s significance, his wife (the *saosao*) is also of great importance. In her address to the *saosao* the bride takes care to be as flattering a possible. Traditionally, the *saosao* looked down on the younger daughters in a family, for they consumed resources but ultimately did not belong to that family.[48] As the local saying went, "When you strip off the radishes, there is more space./When a girl is married off, the *saosao* rejoices".[49] This common family dynamic would account for the particular care with which the bride thanks the *saosao*. The latter is also likely to influence the size of the dowry, because she is influential in deciding how to divide up the resources of the family.

The *niangjiu* (maternal uncle) is also a man of significance to the bride. He is probably the same figure who served as *ajiu* to the bride's mother. Now he continues his protective role towards his sister's daughter. His authority is signified by the coxcomb flower *(jiguan hua)* whose leaves point upwards (Thanking the [Maternal] Uncle, 1). She is delighted that he treasures her like one of his own daughters.

The terms *niangjia* and *pojia* to refer to the two 'mother-homes' are common throughout China.[50] However, the lamenting bride also refers to the groom's family as "that family". The in-laws are referred to as *gongpo daren* and the groom as "the brother who comes to take the bride" *(qu qin gege)*. Once the bride was married, she became "a daughter-in-law in another home" *(bie renjia xifu)*. From then on she would have no share in the family inheritance: "Once gone beyond the eaves, I have no share in the family fortune./Once beyond the backyard, I become an outsider" (*waitou ren;* On the Bridal Sedan, 57–58).

The "major mode" of marriage was the orthodox form celebrated in the Chinese canonical tradition and was marked by a complex negotiation between the two families concerning the dowry and bride-price. This was the only form of marriage in which the bride would engage in "weeping on being married off". It was also the form that offered most status to the woman, who became the legal wife or *qi*. Brides in the major mode were entitled to dowries, and the groom's family paid a bride-price to the parents. These goods were negotiated by the matchmaker and decided upon by the parents. In early twentieth-century Nanhui, young people were betrothed at an early age. The saying went: "Everywhere you go you'll be sure to find/Girls aged thirteen betrothed as brides".[51] In many parts of Nanhui, the young couple would not be able to see each other before marriage.[52] However, the sands communities differed from the standard protocols in this regard as well. As I shall discuss in Chapter 4, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the marriage negotiation went through a stage where the prospective bride actually visited the home of the groom before marriage.

The 'major mode' of marriage was the prestigious form but had rigorous financial requirements. It was often very difficult for families to find bride-prices for their sons and to provide lavish dowries to marry their daughters into the bet-

ter type of family. The *Nanhui xian xu zhi* (1929) reports on the financial distress caused by the major mode of marriage:

> When taking a bride, families seek to do outdo each other. The wasted expenditure is enormous: the ceremony, music, fireworks, and the fees sought are all extravagant. Poor families exert themselves to the utmost to follow local custom; this is popularly known as "putting on a show". They pile up huge debts that they cannot repay over their entire lifetime. They thus end up in bankruptcy. During the *guangxu* and *xuantong* reign eras (1875–1911) 'civilised' new-style weddings *(wenming xin shi)* began to be held, with drums, music, and gaily decorated vehicles, and so past ceremonies are now set aside. Thus one finds that this useless, extravagant expenditure is totally swept away.[53]

In spite of these optimistic words of the gazetteer, provision of the dowry and bride-price remained a critical problem for the poor of Nanhui. Qian Jincai (male from Miaogang, coastal region, b. 1931) reports on the financial burdens of the marriage of his older brother.

> In 1947 my older brother got married. At that time, because we were poor, it was very difficult to take a bride. The bride's side stipulated that they wanted 75 *jin* of cotton for each year of her age. Since she was twenty-two, they wanted 1,650 *jin*. The price of cotton was from 3 *jiao* to 3 *jiao,* 2 cents a *jin*. Because we couldn't come up with this amount of money we had to sell two ploughing oxen. There was no one to sell it to nearby, so there was nothing for it but to take the oxen to Jiaxing in Zhejiang. . . . [After many tribulations] when we got back we left half [the price] at home to pay for the wedding banquet and sent the other half to the home of the bride. Then they asked for five hundred dollars. There was not enough from the sale of the oxen, so we had to borrow money from the maternal uncle. When my older brother married, we divided the family property. Of the two-roomed thatched cottage, each got one room, and I was responsible for the hundred-dollar debt for my brother's marriage. At the time of the division of the total fifteen *mu* of land, my older brother was given five *mu* and I and mother ten *mu*. Because we no longer had oxen for ploughing, we had to plough and turn the soil with our bare hands. It was very hard work; it took seven or eight years to pay off the debt.[54]

There were cheaper, lower-status forms of marriage available in Nanhui, such as concubinage, uxorilocal marriage, child-bride marriage, and coercive forms of marriage. These less orthodox forms were arranged without the standard procedure of go-between, betrothal, and gift giving, and were regarded as inferior.[55] Men of means were able to afford not only a wife but also concubines *(qie)*. In

early twentieth-century Nanhui it was quite common to have up to three concubines as well as a wife.[56] A bride-price was paid to the family, but a concubine was not necessarily entitled to a dowry. This was a situation that offered only meagre status to the woman. Another option was uxorilical marriage (called *shangmen nüxu*), common amongst all social classes. As in the case of Xu Min discussed earlier, the reason for this was to meet the needs of a family that had produced no sons. In this case, a man from a poorer family was induced to marry the daughter of a wealthier one. He would then become the 'son' of his parents-in-law, enjoy rights of inheritance, and undertake duties of ancestral veneration. However, a social stigma attached to the man who entered a uxorilocal marriage because he had abandoned his own ancestral line:

> Before Liberation, if you only had daughters, you could 'borrow' a son. If you borrowed a son you could not borrow the eldest son of a household, because the first-born belonged to that family. . . . when you borrowed a son you could only do so from someone of the same family name. Brothers could borrow sons between them. In the past people looked down on the married-in husband, but now things are a bit better.[57] (Shao Wenxian from the coastal village of Guoyuan, female, b. 1949)

Some poorer families would send a young daughter off for adoption into a family with a view to marrying one of their sons when she came of age. This was known as *tongyangxi,* or "little daughter-in-law marriage", a practice anthropologists refer to as 'minor marriage'. Minor marriage was not socially accepted amongst the elite classes in Jiangnan because of the loss of face involved for the girl and her family. This was the worst option for the Nanhui bride and often led to the exploitation and abuse of the daughter.[58] However, it did provide an option of survival for girls in impoverished families. Marriage was a simple affair for these child brides. When they came of age they were simply given a room with their new husband with little ceremony or dowry:

> Before Liberation, we used to have the custom of raising a child as future bride *(yang xifu)*. Very poor families who could not afford to raise a daughter sent her to other families to be raised. Sometimes a matchmaker would make the introductions. The family of the groom was also very poor. To raise a child as future bride was much less costly; landlord families in general did not raise child brides. When you sent a child bride over, the male side would offer a welcome banquet if they could afford to, but the amount sent to repay the girl's family *(caili)* was very little, in general fifteen dollars would be enough. You would raise the daughter until she was seventeen or eighteen and then hold a ceremony and they would then count as being married. Some held no ceremony at all. (Zhu Baogen, male, from Wangluo village, Xiasha, b. 1923) [59]

> Some very poor families found it difficult to even get a child bride. They would go through a matchmaker and after the initial negotiation arrange to see the family. First they would make arrangements with a wealthy family in the village and have the girl's family invited into that house so that they were totally deceived and believed this was the groom's own home. When they came to get the bride she was taken to a thatched hut instead. Apart from paying fifteen dollars nothing else was required. . . . There were many mothers-in-law who were very hard on the child brides, and they were often beaten and abused, and the girl's family did not know. . . . Generally the age of the child bride was from six to ten. Also, if a family could not come up with a dowry for their fifteen-year-old daughter they would send her off as a child bride. The ones who sought child brides were those who could not come up with the bride-price to purchase a bride. Landlords and rich peasant families very rarely raised child brides. They always wanted the daughters of the wealthy as their daughters-in-law and the daughters of landlords were all married into the homes of the wealthy. So at that time, in marriage, it was a case of landlords seeking landlords and poor people seeking poor people. (Zhu Linhai, male, from Wangluo village, Xiasha, b. 1927) [60]

Two customary forms of marriage in the Yangzi delta, the "bolted-door marriage" *(ban niu qin)* and "seize-the-bride" *(qiang qin)* marriage, involved coercion of the bride. These little-studied forms were practised by the most disadvantaged groups and arose from the shortage of marriageable women. The bolted-door marriage was a form of sororate marriage and was commonly known as *ayi jie jiefu,* or the younger sister marries her (deceased) older sister's husband. When a woman died young in the delta region, the husband had the burden of attempting to find the bride-price for another wife. For the poorer classes, a solution presented itself in marrying the younger sister of the deceased wife. The two families had already exchanged bride-price and dowry and so this obviated the need for any further payments. However it infringed Confucian protocols, which regarded such marriage arrangements as incestuous. The practice was known throughout the delta region before the contemporary period and is the focus of several lengthy narrative songs in circulation in the Lake Tai region.[61] The term 'bolted-door marriage' refers to the way that this irregular union is brought about. The younger sister, often ignorant of the death of her sister, is duped into going into the same room as her brother-in-law. A conspirator bolts them inside the room overnight. In the morning, their virtue compromised, they are considered married.

The other coercive form of marriage was known as *qianqin* ("seizing the bride") or abduction for the purpose of marriage.[62] Like infanticide, marriage by abduction was regarded as abhorrent by the Chinese state, but it was nonetheless prevalent in the delta region and impossible to stamp out. The Nanhui practice known as *qiangqin* involved a local man who could not produce the required bride-

price and was thus unable to marry. The man would get together with a band of friends, form a "seizing-the-bride party" *(qiangqin dui)*, and make preparations to abduct the woman from her home at some time when the men of her family were absent in the fields. Once she had been taken to his home, the 'marriage' would be consummated immediately and the couple considered married. The practice is attested not only in the personal recollections of Nanhui coastal communities today but also in historical records including the local gazetteer, the "bamboo twig songs" composed by local literati, and most important, the ethnographic study of veteran folklore specialist Lou Zikuang, who investigated marriage practices in this region in the 1930s.[63] "Seizing the bride", while regarded as illegal by the Chinese state, was an 'accepted' local institution amongst the Nanhui poor, who rationalised the practice as the last resort of an impoverished man who could not get a bride by any other way.

The prevalence of various marriage practices influenced the socialization of the young women of the delta. They came to learn about the status hierarchy of marriage forms, the major mode being the most prestigious. They heard about impoverished bachelors, unable to afford a bride, and the need to remain within the household boundaries. Young girls were warned about "seizing of the bride" by their mothers and other village women. Sometimes they witnessed an act of abduction in their own village, as in the case of one woman I interviewed.[64] Seizing the bride was associated with women considered 'indecent', that is, young unmarried women deemed to have offended local mores by straying too far from home or being too familiar with visiting males. The importance of the codes of feminine propriety is reflected in the constant counsel of the bride's mother to her daughter, and the anxiety expressed by the bride in attempting to live up to these principles. It was incumbent on a mother to raise her daughter in a 'proper' fashion, not only for the reputation of the family and the girl's future marriage prospects, but also to ward off any attempt to label the daughter as 'indecent' and hence a suitable target for an impoverished man unable to come up with a bride-price.

By the early Republican period, it became commonplace in more urbanised areas of Nanhui for the couple to meet before the wedding, and marriages were not just held in the home but became formal proceedings involving a marriage registration and the issuing of a certificate.[65] However, this westernised form of marriage was unknown to the rural boondocks, and traditional forms of marriage continued into the post-1949 period.

Gender Demographics

Between 1790 and 1862 there were substantially more males than females in Nanhui (see Table 1). In 1862 the gender gap was as high as 119 males to every

100 females. However, within twelve years the ratio had fallen to 105 males. No comparable data is available for the period before 1790, but the predominance of males in the population before 1862 could well reflect the underlying historic situation during times of relative social stability.[66] After 1864, the state's reconstruction efforts after the Taiping Rebellion led to the migration of labourers and their families to less affected areas such as Nanhui. This relative gender balance was preserved into the twentieth century, until the Japanese invasion of 1931. On the eve of the founding of the People's Republic of China, women actually outnumbered men in Nanhui.

The reasons for the reduction in the proportion of males by 1874 would include the greater fatality rate of men at a time of civil war and disturbance, and the movement of men out of rural areas to new employment in industrializing Shanghai. However, the late nineteenth century notwithstanding, one can assume that for much of the history of the region there were considerably more males than females in Nanhui, as in other parts of China.[67] Only wars, civil disturbances, and foreign invasions could change the statistical dominance of men. In spite of the more balanced demographics in Nanhui of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there still remained a class of males with little chance of marrying, due to their relative poverty, to the practice of concubinage, and to the custom of women marrying upwards. In Nanhui almost all women married, and widows who did not remarry were in danger of being abducted into marriage. Nanhui females who survived to adulthood were in great demand, both as wives and for their contribution to the domestic and cash economy. It is even possible to quantify their value in monetary terms. Kathy Le Mons Walker notes that, in the northern Yangzi delta area (Subei) in the 1930s, a very young girl could be sold for ten *yuan* but a seventeen- or eighteen-year-old sold for fifty to sixty *yuan,* "or slightly more than twice the annual wage of a male agricultural labourer".[68] In other words, the value of a girl went up exponentially as she reached marriageable age.

Selective infanticide or neglect of the female infant was a major tool for the control of sex selection. In imperial times, infanticide was regularly banned by Chinese law and frowned upon by the elites, who engaged in movements to prevent it.[69] The late Qing period saw the establishment of foundling homes and rules for the adoption and care of relinquished infants. The first foundling home *(yuying tang)* in Nanhui was built in the county seat in 1841.[70] However, infanticide continued unabated and remained largely beyond the reach of legal sanctions until well into the second half of the twentieth century.[71] As Robert Brenner and Christopher Isett have said of the Yangzi delta region during the late imperial era: "Weighing the immediate need to secure household sustenance against long-term need for old-age care, peasant couples were perforce required to make the unpleasant but necessary choice to curtail subdivision by either expelling sons and/or controlling the number of children born/surviving infancy".[72] Records

from regional gazetteers in the region of Shanghai in the nineteenth century point to the shortage of marriageable women, the prevalence of female infanticide, and the common practice of abduction for the purpose of marriage.[73]

The famed Chinese anthropologist Fei Hsiao-tung has left us with a detailed portrayal of what infanticide meant in practice. In his study of his home village of Kaixianggong near Lake Tai in the 1930s, Fei explained the economy behind infanticide as understood by the villagers. Boy babies could be killed if the family had too little land to separate amongst the sons, that is, where division of the land would mean poverty for the next generation. But infanticide was more prevalent in the case of girl babies.[74] He also notes that, for his sample population, the ratio of females to males in the newborn to five-year age group was 100 to 135, and that only 37 percent of households had girls under the age of sixteen. To the modern eye this reflects a disregard for human life, but Fei argued that "the children who survive are highly valued, even though there is an outward show of indifference".[75]

The issue of infanticide was more complex than simply a bias against girl babies. It was a household decision based on careful calculations about future land division and inheritance, labour requirements, the perceived burden of the girl's dowry, and the marriage options available in the community. A man named Xu Min born in 1910 and resident in Miaogang, on the coast south of Shuyuan, volunteered the information that in his community there was no custom of female infanticide. This declaration implied that female infanticide was indeed prevalent elsewhere in Nanhui.[76] Women in Miaogang did light work in the fields as well as spinning and weaving cotton. In the case of the poorest communities, such as at Miaogang, women's labour was indispensable. This might have led to a higher survival rate for girl children. Xu Min himself reared four daughters and no sons. When the time came for them to marry, instead of giving his daughters dowries and marrying them off, Xu Min arranged for the grooms, presumably from even poorer families, to marry into his household uxorilocally.[77] If a family was indeed too poor to raise a daughter, an option other than infanticide would be to arrange for her marriage as a child bride *(tongyangxi)*. They would raise the daughter for a few years and then send her away to be raised by another family. At maturity she would be married to their son without need of matchmaker, bride-price, and dowry. In this way, the existence of flexible marriage practices amongst the poor allowed some families to avoid female infanticide. Well-bred families had a narrower range of options. Uxorilocal marriage (the husband marrying into their family) was a possibility if they had daughters but no sons, but sending their genteel daughter off as a child bride was not socially acceptable.

Women who were deliberately spared infanticide were celebrated in family stories as especially valued. In Nanhui I met one elderly woman who was introduced to me as having been cherished from birth by her family.[78] The story went

that if she had been born male, the infant would have been drowned. In this case the family had several boys and actually wanted a girl in preference to a boy. The same woman was given a lavish dowry by her family when she married, and her parents even refused a bride-price to signal her importance to them. One can assume that the refusal of the bride-price gave additional 'face' to the bride in her new home and bolstered affiliative ties and obligations between the two families.

Decisions to retain an infant or otherwise were also subject to the judgement of the local fortune-teller. I learned of the case of an infant boy born in the 1940s whose horoscope (hour and date of birth) was held to clash with that of his grandfather. The fortune-teller had declared that the boy was unlucky and would bring disaster upon the family. This boy was adopted out of his natal family and only came into contact with his siblings in later life.

One could conclude that in Nanhui, as elsewhere in China, infanticide was only one of a range of options to control fertility and obtain the desired sex balance that met a family's perceived requirements. For those resident near Nanhui township, it was possible to send the unwanted infant to a foundling home. In the case of more isolated communities, 'excess' children could be adopted by other families or married off at a young age. However, the prevalence and acceptance of infanticide shaped the socialisation of children in the area. We can gain an insight into this from the imagery of the lamenting bride.

The mother of the Nanhui bride tells her that when she was born her father only sat and smoked by the stove and did not complain. This is a sign of special favour from her father, because general custom had it that the birth of a girl was greeted with signs of displeasure. As the young daughter grew up she would come to realize that her parents had made a decision at birth to nurture her, raise her to adulthood, and then honour her by arranging a marriage in the socially accepted 'major mode' (that is, as first wife rather than as a concubine, and certainly not as a child bride). In the bridal lament repertoire the Nanhui implicitly recognises that her family made a decision to keep and raise her to maturity. At one point in her lament she rounds on her father, declaring he made the wrong decision at her birth. He should have killed her instead of raising her only to cast her out on marriage:

> Dear Father,
> You should simply have killed me when I was born and that is all.
> You should just have struck me three times with the shovel and twice with the hoe,
> and put an end to me.
> But now you have raised me for over twenty years, only to send me forth as
> someone's wife.
>
> (Filling the Box, 472–475)

As with many of the protests in the laments, these angry words are hyperbolic. The bride knows full well that infants were not struck with farm implements but drowned in a basin of water and placed in the barrel for human waste. Such a decision would be made by the seniors in the family, including the mother.[79] One could understand these histrionic words of the bride as her perception that at birth her parents had decided to raise her and do indeed value her in spite of sending her off in marriage. The knowledge that the family must cherish her—after all, they have decided to nurture and raise her—is fundamental to the strategies of the bride in drawing on the sympathies of her audience and inducing in them sentiments of sorrow at her departure.

* * *

People need face as trees need bark.
—Nanhui saying[80]

The groups that migrated into coastal Nanhui from northern Jiangnan in the late nineteenth century formed remote communities largely beyond the reach of the state. Here they toiled to make a precarious living for unseen landlords, unable to accumulate wealth and social capital, continually in debt to neighbouring townships. Distant as they were from the wealthy centres of Jiangnan, they showed an intense concern with notions of face and hierarchy in the way they enacted intricate kinship and marriage configurations and used marriage as a spur to social mobility. The Nanhui bride was aware that marriage as the primary wife gave her greatest face. It clearly set her apart from those who were sent away as child brides, married off as concubines, abducted into marriage, or not kept at birth. As primary wife she sought to build on her sisterly relationship with her elder brother and his wife. Ties of intimacy forged between her marital and natal families would add face to both families, and would benefit the next generation in turn. In a society where marriageable women were scarce, the young woman came to realize that simply by living to puberty she had become a valued commodity in the marriage market. These insights, transmitted in the formulaic expressions of local sayings and the bridal lament, shaped the way in which she negotiated her own marriage destiny.

CHAPTER 3

The Hollow Cotton Spool

Women's Labour in Nanhui

I am just a cotton spool, hollow inside,
When I draw out the cotton thread to weave, I'm not up to the task.
—Thanking the Mother, 18–19

In her lament the Nanhui bride would constantly reiterate images of unworthiness based on her inner "hollowness" as opposed to the solidity of the senior women in the family. Her work in spinning and weaving was intimately bound up with her sense of self-worth and her perceived value in the marriage market.

Historically, women were of critical importance in the development of a commercial cotton industry in the lower Yangzi delta in the late imperial period. In the thirteenth century a Taoist nun called Huang Daopo brought cotton technology with her from Hainan.[1] Huang Daopo is revered today in a memorial in the Shanghai Botanic Gardens adjacent to a museum devoted to early cotton technology. In subsequent centuries cotton production spread through drier areas within the delta, particularly in Songjiang Prefecture, which became foremost in the empire for the export of cloth to areas as far away as Beijing, Guangdong, and Fujian.[2] Unlike paddy rice, cotton could be grown in the reclaimed land with its alkaline soil.[3] For most poor peasants in the late imperial period, the production of sideline cotton handicrafts enabled the household to pay its taxes. However, financial returns for all but the merchants were very low.[4]

In spite of its commercialisation, cotton remained primarily a cottage industry, centring on domestic production.[5] As K. Chao has explained, the development of large-scale professional production did not develop in the cotton industry, unlike the situation with the expensive commodity of silk in the western part of the delta. There were firms for tasks such as calendering (the pressing of cloth to render it smooth to the touch) and dyeing of cotton cloth, but no factories for spinning

and weaving cotton. Cotton, unlike silk, was the textile of choice of the common people, who required it primarily for their subsistence needs. The techniques of cotton production were relatively simple and well adapted to production within the household. Little capital or training was needed.[6] The existence of 'surplus', that is, unwaged female labour, was another reason why cotton textile production was carried out within households.[7] The conjunction of simple techniques and surplus labour meant that rural families were capable of carrying out the main stages of cotton production in their own fields and homes—specifically, growing cotton, spinning it into yarn, weaving the yarn into cloth, and then sewing garments and bedding for themselves or bolts of cloth for sale at the markets.[8]

The women of Songjiang Prefecture played a crucial role in the production of cotton production as a cash crop. The famous Christian convert and official Xu Guangqi (1562–1633) noted that the production of cotton and silk floss "depend[s] on women's skills. [By relying on them] it is possible to pay all of the above taxes and also provide for daily livelihood".[9] Poems of the era hailed the virtuous wife who toiled through the night to provide for her family.[10] In the late nineteenth century, Nanhui women not only worked at the spinning and weaving of cotton but also toiled in the fields on a seasonal basis. This set the coastal area apart from more affluent regions dominated by rice paddy where women did relatively little fieldwork.[11] Huang notes that in places where cotton production dominated, such as Fengxian and Nanhui, both men and women participated in hard field labour.[12] Nanhui women toiled during the summer with the men heaving the water cart and ladling out water to irrigate the fields:[13] "When the water cart is carried up steep embankments, it takes five or six people to transport it. In summer men and women toil, bare sweat intermingling; one can hear the sound of them heaving [as they lift the water cart]."[14] Women also undertook the back-breaking task of weeding:

> In the heat of a summer's day they weed the cotton fields; this is popularly known as *tuo hua*. Sweat flows like rain. It is extremely hot, so they scoop up water from the pond or even go into the water wearing clothing and soak a while. Poor women do this, and even women who are better off must also personally engage in this task.[15]

In the twentieth century, weeding cotton plants was regarded as relatively light work that could be done by older women. If their feet were bound they could sit on a stool.[16] The 1929 *Nanhui xian xu zhi* documents the arduous work performed by women in the early Republican period:

> The farmers are the most industrious but also the poorest. They rise at first light and go to the fields on an empty stomach. This is called doing the early morning stint.[17]

> The whole family toils, men with their wives, their bodies damp and their feet muddy, returning only when the sun sets. In the evening the men peddle [to irrigate the rice paddy] or weave bags of rushes, while the women spin yarn or weave cloth. They keep going until the third watch and only then go to sleep.[18]

In Nanhui women and girls not only toiled on their own plots but also worked as hired hands in the fields of others. The *Nanhui xian xu zhi* notes that they would often work their own plots at first light then offer their services to others. In the summer rainy season, when weeds cover the cotton, young boys and girls would also work as hired hands.[19] Mao Huoying (female from Miaogang, b. 1924) recalled her own experience in these words:

> We poor people did long-term labour or short-term labour [as hired hands]. Short-term labour was worth ten or so copper coins a day, long-term labour was paid at the end of the year; one year was worth around fifty dollars. Those who did long-term labour were all locals, very few outsiders did that. In the busy season, I also helped out in the fields, weeding grass, picking cotton, and loosening the ground. We were paid one cent for one *jin* of cotton. My husband didn't do this; he didn't have time because he had to till the fields. Sometimes he would go elsewhere to work [as a hired hand]. He would go to Shanghai to hire himself to others to carry salt and rice.[20]

Yuan Cunxian (female from Henggang in northwestern Nanhui, b. 1931) cut reeds for a living or worked the waterwheels to irrigate fields:

> Before Liberation, we were poor peasants. We did not till fields. Every day we went to the edge of the old sea wall to cut reeds. The land was owned by the landlord. In one day if we cut ten bundles, then we gave him six bundles and kept only four for ourselves. Once we'd sold these we could take some rough grains back. At that time we ate little white rice and mainly ate rough grain. Sometimes I went to people's places to peddle their waterwheels . . . . in one day I would earn several *mao*.[21]

Nanhui women also toiled like men in the salt industry. Some worked as salt peddlars, transporting salt far from their home villages. The 1879 edition of the local gazetteer noted:

> In Yituan and Ertuan the women lay out the salt to dry. Coping with hunger and cold, the stronger ones can carry salt [on panniers hung from a bamboo pole] for a hundred or more *li*. Those without employment rely on this to pay for their food and clothing, bearing the salt on their backs to get by. This is a different case to salt smugglers transporting salt in boats.[22]

Labour and Foot Binding

The fact that many women living in coastal Nanhui did not bind their feet was a key factor in the stronger role of women in the local economy.[23] As the *Nanhui xian xu zhi* (1929) noted:

> The women by the coast do not bind their feet. In the past they earned their living sowing crops, weeding out grass, peddling the water wheel and bearing salt on their backs. But west of Qintang it is customary to set a high value on bound feet, the younger the better. Consequently the circulation of their bodily *qi* is weak and the children they give birth to are not robust. During the *guangxu* and *xuantong* periods (1875–1911) those of education advocated natural feet and enlightened people followed this. For this reason the custom is beginning to decline but still has not been entirely eradicated.[24]

According to my elderly female informants (some of whom proudly showed me their natural feet), women from the poorest classes did not bind their feet because of the requirement to work in the fields. Xu Min (from Miaogang, b. 1901) married a woman from Subei who did have bound feet, but emphasised, "People here [in Miaogang] did not bind feet".[25] This is an indication that, although brides who married in from elsewhere in Jiangnan might have bound feet, "the people of the sands" resisted that almost universal trend.[26] The lamenting bride is well aware of the status of the bound-foot woman and will often bemoan her "big"—that is, natural—feet, so crude and clumsy compared with the exquisitely tiny feet of her husband's sisters and sisters-in-law. Both the mother and daughter in the Nanhui lament have natural feet and walk around barefoot (Filling the Box, 186). This is a source of humiliation for the lamenting bride and an indication of dire poverty.[27] Generally, given the shortage of women, a girl with tiny bound feet stood a chance of obtaining a marriage into a better type of family.[28] The decision made by the people of the sands not to bind the feet of their women not only signified that they worked in the fields but also that they had limited social mobility. The ambiguity of the young woman's feelings about this situation is captured admirably in a folk song of the delta region, "The Ten Hates of the Wife". The bride sings that she hates the fact that her feet are "big" and more than "three inches long", but in the next breath she reprimands her mother for not taking the bindings off her feet, and complains about the difficulty she has in walking.[29] The unequivocal pride in natural feet displayed by some of my elderly female informants in the 1990s can be attributed to the condemnation of foot binding in the revolutionary era.

The Decline of the Household Cotton Industry

By the mid- to late nineteenth century, Nanhui women's labour in the production of cotton was indispensable to the family income. The gazetteer paints a grim picture of conditions at this time:

> The women weave in order to supplement the [family] income and provide clothing and food. This is true not just for village settlements but also for the townships. . . . The rate of woven cloth is one bolt *(pi)* per day, but sometimes they can reach two bolts per day. They [women] work through the night without sleeping. The income men earn from the harvest of the fields goes to official coffers to pay interest and is exhausted before the year has even come to an end. For their food and clothing [the family] relies utterly on [the work of] women.[30]

In the early twentieth century the cottage industry declined with the advent of cotton mills using Western technology. According to the *Nanhui xian xu zhi* (1929):

> From the Yuan period on women from poor homes relied on spinning and weaving for a living. But over the past thirty years, a large number of textile mills have been built in Shanghai. Their yarn is pure, white, and finely textured, much superior in quality to hand-spun products. So there is no more profit to be had from handicraft spinning. Foreign-style cloth holds sway because it is wider in size, cheaper in price and is superior to local cloth *(tubu)*. There is no longer any profit to be made in hand-woven products.[31]

> From the *tongzhi* period on [1862–1874] Shanghai's clothing merchants begin purchasing patterned clothing, and so cotton-ginning factories were to be found everywhere using small cotton gins operated by women using their hands and feet. In one day these can produce ten or so *jin* of clothing. In the mid-*guangxu* period [1875–1909] foreign-style gins appeared. In one day these could produce several score *jin* of clothing, so naturally the small cotton gins disappeared.[32]

However, although hand-produced yarn and cotton cloth virtually vanished as a cash crop in the early twentieth century, it remained an indispensable part of the local subsistence economy even up to the 1980s:

> Before we always wore old-style cloth *(laobu* or *tubu)* that we had woven ourselves from cotton. First of all we had to make yarn from the cotton buds and after dyeing it

> weave it into cloth. When we asked people to dye our cloth we didn't have to pay them because we could help them out later in turn. There were all sorts of colours. At that time every household wove its own cloth. My son wore local cloth when he was young. When I could make him something new he was thrilled. (Li Yinxian from Guoyan cun, near Datuan, female, b. 1960) [33]

> Before I used to wear local cloth. I'd weave the cloth and wear it myself. I'd ask someone to come to my home to sew it up. The cost of sewing was five *jiao* [ten cents] a day. Ten years ago [that is, in 1988] I stopped wearing local cloth. By that time there was no one left in the village wearing local cloth. At that time foreign cloth was seven to eight dollars a *chi* [Chinese foot] and tailoring costs were ten dollars a day. (Chen Guibao from Guoyuan cun near Datuan, female, b. 1933) [34]

Labour and the Status of Women

Did the indispensability of women to the economic survival of the Nanhui poor mean that they had a higher status within their families and communities? Kathy Le Mons Walker, in her study of the northern delta region (Subei) has argued that the opposite was the case.[35] The income generated by women was controlled by the head of the family, and the production of cotton within the house had the effect of confining women's sphere of action to where she lived, unlike the men, who toiled in the fields and visited local towns. According to Walker, the trend towards household textile production thus created more scope for men to control women's labour and led to "an intensification of patriarchal relations".[36]

Lynda S. Bell has argued for a similar effect in the case of women's sericulture production in the Lake Tai area: "when women remained within rural households and worked for cash primarily to avoid family subsistence crises, new work roles had little positive effect on women's social standing despite their enhanced earning power".[37] Hill Gates, too, notes the "invisible" nature of women's work because it was pooled together with the family's assets. The work of the women of the family was seen as a "special, gendered form of 'obedience' carried out by subordinate kinswomen".[38] The main argument here is that if women labour within the home rather than outside, if their contribution is pooled and hence "invisible", and if they are unable to market their own products, then their status will not be enhanced by their labour.

This may be true with regard to the control of household wealth, but a strictly economic perspective on what the woman derives personally for her labour does not take into account the symbolic associations of her toil and its place in the popular imagination. No one who has visited rural women in Nanhui and seen the pride with which they show off their cotton bolts and garments could doubt

the importance of textile production as a display of women's talent and skill and as a source of self-esteem. One of my informants dusted off a spinning wheel, carved by her father in intricate 'lucky' motifs and presented to her as part of her dowry. She was delighted to show me this cherished object, long discarded with the advent of Western textile technology.

Women's Labour in Laments

> If the shoots are fine then the harvest will be full,
> If the mother is fine, then the daughter will turn out well.[39]

It was the mother's duty to teach the daughter not only domestic work but how to produce spun cotton and woven bolts of cloth for sale at the market or for domestic use. The young girl learnt to understand the value of her growing skills in the imagistic repertoire transmitted by women across generations. In her laments, the bride and her mother sang constantly of spinning cotton *(qiansha),* weaving cloth *(zhibu),* and brushing cotton *(shuabu).* Spinning was regarded as requiring less skill than weaving. Young girls began learning cotton textiles by being taught to spin; mothers and adult women of the family engaged in the harder task of weaving.[40] In the laments, the wife of the elder brother is portrayed as her main teacher in spinning and weaving. It is the *saosao* who has been generous in giving her remnants of cloth from which she has made clothing for her dowry. Further, her *saosao* has generously toiled through the night to provide even more items for her dowry (Thanking the Brother's Wife). She also sings of the supposed skills of the wife of the groom's elder brother (Dama), who is praised for the speed and dexterity with which she spins and weaves (On the Bridal Sedan, 191–197). The bride declares that she cannot compare her lowly skills with these two paragons of female industry. Embroidery is rarely mentioned in these laments because it is associated with ladies from fine homes, but there is one occasion when the bride will imagine her family becoming wealthy and her sister learning to do superb embroidery (A Bowl of Rice, 23–29).

The commercial value of the woman's production of cloth surplus to the family's needs is recognized in the laments. As she leaves her natal family, the bride expresses the hope that the cloth of her *saosao* will be hailed as top-quality in Shanghai town (A Bowl of Rice, 40). This clearly signals the importance of women's cloth to the economic success of the family. One could also add that the trousseau the bride displays both in her natal home and in the home of the groom consists of more than just required objects in the dowry–bride-price exchange or prosaic items for everyday use. For the lamenting bride the real importance of the cotton bolts, garments, and bedding on display is precisely to exhibit her skills and

those of her female relatives. These products of her labour are crucial indicators of her value and the best way to enhance her status in her new home.

Engagement in cotton production was also the essential context in which bridal laments were learnt. It was during her participation in labour such as cotton weeding with other women in the fields, spinning, and weaving, that a young girl learnt how to lament. According to the Nanhui women interviewed, only peasant women performed laments. More affluent women, such as one we visited in the township of Datuan, did not learn or perform lamentations, with its complex repertoire of formulaic songs. In fact, urbanised women would have had little opportunity to learn the lamentation repertoire, which was primarily exchanged and practised by women at work.

One could thus conclude that the process of learning the lament repertoire was inseparable from the labour of the young girl in cotton textiles. Furthermore, it was female production of cotton textiles that provided one of the major metaphorical constructs in the lament cycle. Through images of cotton yarn, cotton spools, bolts of cotton and cotton clothes the bride and her mother construct images of the daughter's value as a marriage commodity and hence of her subjective status as a woman. In the first stage of the lament, the dialogue with her mother, images of cotton are exchanged as part of the 'argument' about the value of the young bride.

The young daughter used to play with skeins of cotton as a child. This childish game signifies the comfortable days when the daughter lived in her natal home, cherished by her mother. But it is the mother's duty to tell her these days are coming to an end:

> [*Mother to daughter*]
> You must not compare this [i.e., marriage] to living at your mother's home;
> When you live in your mother's home, you can play idly with cotton skeins,
> You can scamper from the western room to the eastern room.
>
> (Filling the Box, 3–5)

The daughter's dowry should comprise a large number of cotton goods made by the women of the family, but the mother declares they are too poor to provide the accepted items of clothing, each of which is lovingly detailed:

> [*Mother to daughter*]
> We have not set out bedding and mattress wrapped up in [red] cloth,
> There is not even a pair of coverlets of yellow silk,
> Not even one indigo-blue shirt,
> Marked with red from the "coxcomb plant",
> Not even one new blue shirt,

Nor one black and blue cotton skirt. . . .
Nor are there ten or eight bundles of clothing wrapped up in cloth.
(Filling the Box, 93–100)

[*Mother to daughter*]
Your mother has nothing [good] to give you,
I have not given you a "pure water" white-patterned blue-lined jacket
Nor a pair of matching red and green coverlets,
Nor can I give you a bean-flower-patterned coverlet.
(Filling the Box, 181–184)

The daughter is terrified about the reaction of the groom's family to her meagre dowry. Her cotton bolts are wrapped tightly to appear solid and substantial, but this will not fool them.

Dear Mother,
You gave me thirty-six feet of local cloth,
And wrapped it tightly in a roll,
But when I take it to the family of that name they won't want to look at it,
it won't please them,
They'll take it in by the front gate,
And throw it out by the back window.
(Filling the Box, 205–209)

When the bride thanks the local woman who serves as ritual specialist at her wedding departure, she describes in hyperbolic terms the poverty of the family and their inability to pay her as she deserves. Once again, the payment is in cotton goods:

Today I kneel down to you, head on the ground, and thank you deeply.
My mother's home is bare, our hands are tight,
When we dye our clothes, our dye is not blue enough,
When I make clothing, there is not enough cloth for a shirt.
I have no blue-print skirt to offer you,
I have no cloth shirt to give you,
I have no cloth padding from the tray to give you,
But mama does not consider these things or take them into account . . .
(Thanking the Fortunate Woman, 22–29)

In formulaic rhetoric, the bride constantly refers to her comical inability to reach the most basic standard of maturity for Nanhui woman, the weaving of cotton cloth.

Dear Mother,
I cannot use the loom, nor can I weave cloth,
As for the shuttle of boxwood, I know not front from back,
The 'ox-sinew' shuttle, I don't know how to use it.
(Thanking the Mother, 29–31)

The Hollow Self

As well as symbolizing her market value as a marriage commodity, metaphors of cotton yarn and cloth also represent the bride's inner essence as a woman. Women as a sex are ill-fated, a notion conveyed in her cursing of the matchmaker: "When I live with my mother-in-law, I will lead their family to ruin/When spinning and weaving, the yarn will snap"; Thanking the Matchmaker 2:22–23). Women are "hollow" inside because they are unable to live up to the demands of filial piety. Only men can be truly mature—that is, "solid" in their ability to fully meet their obligations to their own parents. This idea is conveyed implicitly in many images comparing male solidity (the copper ladle) and female hollowness and instability (the rice sieve):

Mother,
You have good reason to value my older brother, like the copper ladle in the soup pot.
If you use a rice sieve to bear water, it all flows away.
But if you use a wooden bucket to draw water, then the vats will be full.
You have raised this small daughter but have nothing to show for it.
(Filling the Box, 363–366)

The daughter is dependent on both parents, and thus unable to carry out full filial duties:

My own Father,
You've raised this young daughter, now you send me off with nothing to show for it.
You've raised this young daughter, I'm just like the warm soup pot on the stove, if you try to strike me with a copper scoop like a drum, no sound comes forth,
You've raised this young daughter, she can't be counted like a son.
(Thanking the Father, 54–56)

The nature of the daughter is to be hollow, like the cotton spool:

I am just a cotton spool, hollow inside.
When I draw out the cotton thread to weave, I'm not up to the task.
(Thanking the Mother, 18–19)

The groom's family, by contrast, is marked by images of tightness and solidity, signifying their wealth and status. The mother tells the daughter that they in fact accepted a large bride-price from the groom's family but can only give her a meagre dowry in return. This implies that the bride's family are so poor they have no option but to "sell" her in marriage rather than negotiating a face-saving arrangement where the dowry more or less equals the bride-price.

We took copper and tin vessels and "welcoming money".
They gave us fifty pieces of pure white silver wrapped in cloth as tight as the winch on a loom.
(Filling the Box, 238–239)

In the average female life cycle as understood by Nanhui women, she will go from the idleness of childhood to the hollowness of young adulthood and the solidity of full female maturity. The last stage is represented in the images of the *saosao,* who is portrayed as an expert weaver and the very paragon of mature womanhood. Implicit here is an understanding that the bride can aspire to the status of tightly woven cloth as she in turn becomes a senior woman in the household of the husband.

Saosao, you toil in your room, sprinkling abundant dew as you weave [spittle].
[Like] a steady wind and quiet ripples you clean the cloth.
You pound more rapidly than the pole on the spinning machine.
My sister-in-law, in brushing the yarn you brush it out evenly,
In making ready the cloth you draw it out tightly,
In weaving, you weave it close and fine.
(Thanking the Brother's Wife, 9–14)

At her departure, the bride uses images of tight solidity to confer this ritual blessing on the *saosao:*

You'll be able to wind the cotton skein so tight it seems part of the bobbin,
Your skein will be as tight as stone on the bobbin.
Saosao, you will link up the warp and weft at the start as quickly as the strike of a bell.
In less than an evening, you will weave three small bolts of cloth.
(A Bowl of Rice, 33–36)

These images of work in cotton textiles comprise an integral part of the Nanui lament repertoire. They demonstrate that the bride is well aware of the crucial importance of her work in textiles both to the subsistence needs of her family and to the generation of a cash income. Far from being an "invisible" form of labour, the cotton goods the bride has herself created or received from her family become, through the lament performance and marriage ceremony, a highly visible manifestation of the value and significance of women's talent and skills.

What is missing from this pattern of women's work is their labour in the fields. As we have seen in Chapter 2, women in Nanhui assisted with crop irrigating, rice planting, and cotton weeding, although ploughing the fields was a man's job. However, work in the fields does not appear in the Nanhui lament repertoire in spite of its prominence in the lives of individual Nanhui women. In Nanhui bridal laments it is domestic work such as cooking, spinning, and weaving that are presented as the primary tasks of women. This is explicable as a constraint in the transmitted repertoire. Bridal laments are known in many parts of China, and although the Nanhui laments are local in their language, idiom, and much of their imagery, the basic structure of the bridal lament and its generic characteristics derived from elsewhere (discussed further in Chapter 5). In the case of the Nanhui regional tradition, rhetorical formulae about women's work in the fields was not grafted onto the repertoire in spite of its actual importance in women's lives. Perhaps this was because it was not traditionally viewed as 'women's work'. It was cotton textiles and cooking that set the standards by which women were judged for their talent and virtue. Women's work in the fields was simply supplementary to that of men and did not constitute, at least in the eyes of women, a separate domain of their own.

CHAPTER 4

Seizing a Slice of Heaven

The Lament Cycle of Pan Cailian

> Daughter,
> When you live at their house, you must seize your own slice
> of Heaven and your own piece of Earth.
> (*Mother to daughter,* Filling the Box, 513)

We have noted that bridal laments were performed only during the ceremony for the 'major mode' of marriage. In concubinage the bride was regarded as being sold into the home of the groom; in uxorilocal marriage the bride remained in her parents' home and had no reason for sorrow; and in child marriage she was partly raised in the home of the groom and married to one of their sons with minimal ceremony. For all the bride's protestations of sorrow, marriage as primary wife was the best option available to the Nanhui village woman and indicated the relatively high status of the woman concerned. Further, through insistent questioning about the precise calculations surrounding the dowry and bride-price, the lamenting bride was able to rhetorically negotiate her own market 'value' within the marriage transaction. Her emerging understanding of the value of the dowry and bride-price, and hence of her own person, lies at the heart of her lament performance.

In this chapter I shall examine the stages and verbal artistry of the lament cycle in order to appreciate the rhetorical strategies deployed by the bride and her mother, and the reasons why laments moved and 'entertained' their audiences. The first topic to be discussed here will be the poetics of Nanhui laments, particularly the way in which they reflect the poetic and linguistic attributes of folk songs of the Wu area. Next I shall examine the various stages of the lament cycle within the marriage ceremony, beginning with the verbal duel between the mother and daughter, proceeding to the daughter's 'thanks' to family members, and then to laments sung at specific moments in the bridal departure. I shall also discuss how the lament reflected—or in some cases, failed to reflect—common Nanhui mar-

riage practices, and also how the participants in this lament cycle constructed a notion of marriage somewhat at odds with the canonical Confucian idea of wifely submission. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of how the bride rhetorically 'negotiated' her value in terms of the bride-price and dowry and sought to build up strong natal ties that could continue to offer her protection and status in her new home. As we shall see, the bridal lament was a key site for the socialisation of the bride into patriarchal notions of womanhood. At the same time, the lament form allowed her a surprising amount of agency if she was skilled enough to adapt it creatively to her own purposes.

The Nanhui lament drew on the linguistic and poetic resources of the "folk songs of the Wu region" *(Wu ge)* of the lower Yangzi delta region.[1] Wu songs were not constrained by set line lengths of five or seven syllables, as one finds in Chinese poetry and songs generally. Many lines contained 'padding words' and could have ten or more syllables to a line. The inclusion of typical Wu expressions of two or three syllables adds considerably to the flexibility and expressive quality of the song.[2] The same features are characteristic of the bridal laments of Nanhui and are an important indication that these laments developed their linguistic repertoire predominantly from the Wu dialect region rather than from another lament tradition.

For the benefit of readers interested in the verbal artistry of the Nanhui lament, I have set out the first ten lines of the lament cycle of Pan Cailian in Appendix 1. This segment is part of the stage known as "Filling the Box" and is sung in dialogic form by the mother and daughter. The mother begins with a traditional invocation to the rising sun, a sign of auspiciousness. Intermittently one finds invocations to "dear mother" or "daughter". The line lengths are highly variable, but an underlying pattern of seven syllables to a line is apparent, usually falling in the second half of the line. In the excerpt given in the appendix I have used spacing to identify the underlying heptasyllabic metre (divided into units of four and three syllables). In this segment, lines often begin with repetitive formulations such as "You must", "You must not", or "When you live at your mother's home". Particles are added to lengthen the melodic unit. In performance, lines would often be drawn out with the sounds of sobbing and conclude with a final cry. Nanhui laments are not routinely rhymed but assonantal; rhyme tends to occur in couplets. For example, in the excerpt under discussion one finds that lines 1 and 2 and lines 9 and 10 engage in assonantal rhyme. These rhymed couplets contain statements that sound like adages or sayings—the bride will have to mend her ways, the groom's family is imposing and well-connected. The lines would be easy to remember and to transfer from one section to another. One could readily imagine them as part of the underlying core material of the original repertoire to which the bride and mother add more homely material specific to the local situation.

The main poetic feature of the Nanhui lament is the use of hyperbole and

rapid shifts in tone. Often this takes the bride into a world of exaggerated grief and anger, but there is also an amazing amount of sheer comedy in this lament cycle. The bride constantly pokes fun at herself and her family and heaps exaggerated scorn on the groom's family:

> When I go to greet my mother-in-law, she'll pretend to be deaf.
> When I greet my father-in-law, he'll pretend to be blind.
> When I greet my aunts and uncles, they'll be like stinging burrs.
> (Filling the Box, 294–296)

At one point, when the bride is getting hoarse, she asks her aunts not to laugh at her (Filling the Box, 315–316). When during fieldtrips I listened to elicited lament performance in Nanhui, the audience would chuckle from time to time at the pungent wit and choice language of the lamenter. In lengthy lament segments, such as the very first one, "Filling the Box", the listener is swept away by the rapid changes in mood, content, and style. Far from being one of unrelieved gloom, the tone shifts in bewildering fashion from comedy to sorrow, from anger to despair. Periodically we are reminded of prosaic matters, such as exactly what needs to go in the bride's trousseau. In other words, the Nanhui lament cycle is complex, entertaining, and moving in the same way that all good literature and performance art has the power to enthrall us. Humor and wit are necessary emotional counterparts to the black anger and grief of much of the lament cycle and intensify rather than detract from the goal of making the audience weep.

The Stages of the Lament Performance

The lament performance began three days before the groom's party arrived. For most of this period, the bride remained in an inner chamber of the house, usually her bedroom. Her trousseau will be laid out around the room and wrapped up. The lament opens with the mother's words of instruction, in a lengthy section called "Filling the Box" (that is, packing up the dowry). This opening dialogue comprises some five hundred lines or about one third of the lament cycle translated here. It is, by general agreement, one of the most moving and dramatic within the cycle, and throws considerable light on the mother-daughter relationship as constructed in the lament.

"Filling the Box": The Mother-Daughter Dialogue

It is the mother who largely controls the direction of this opening stage of the lament cycle. In "Filling the Box", the mother and daughter engage in a type of verbal duel, where they echo, deny, and contradict each other in turn. The moth-

er's duty is to console her daughter by telling her what a good match she has made in spite of the daughter's deficiencies. She also advises her on how to survive in the groom's household. The daughter bewails her expulsion from the natal home, her unreadiness for marriage, and the unhappiness she foresees in her husband's home.

In the course of her dialogue the mother uses many rhetorical tactics to convince her daughter that she is useless, unskilled, ugly, and without value. The mother's words and her daughter's response constitutes one of the fullest and frankest rhetorical constructions of female subordination that one can find in pre-contemporary Chinese oral and written literature. The mother recalls the family's disappointment at the birth of a daughter. However, she should be grateful that her father did not go so far as to complain outright at the birth of a girl:

> You were reborn to your mother, down to your ten fingers, a piece of flesh.
> Born from my belly fat, a lump of flesh.
> When you were reborn to your father, he smoked his pipe in silence by the stove,
> Saying not a word [of complaint] when people enquired . . ."
>
> (Filling the Box, 163–166)

Far from hiding the commercial nature of the marriage transaction, the mother declares forthrightly, "You were reborn to a poor father and a poor mother—you are poor from birth./A girl from a wealthy family has a rich dowry,/ But a girl from a poor family is just put up for sale!" (240–242). She is equally frank about the marriage value of the daughter, "Our young daughter sought in marriage has coarse skin and big feet [unbound feet]./She is short and stunted, not like a proper person at all" (249–250). She imagines that when the groom's family draw back the curtain to see the bride they will be grievously disappointed: "Our small daughter with her coarse skin and big feet,/Valueless as a piece of wood, not like a proper person at all " (254–255). She enumerates the allegedly vast wealth of the groom's family in hyperbolic statements: "You are going to the family of that name, people of property./Their residence has ten wings and nine courtyards,/Our small daughter, how are you worthy of this?" (272–274).

The mother also gives the bride concrete advice about how to cope with her new family. Her first goal should be to serve her parents-in-law. She enjoins her daughter many times to "fix her resolve" *(zhiqi)* to respect and serve the seniors of the family (332–333). As for her husband, it is up to the wife to ensure they become intimate like "a pair of mandarin ducks", "two dough sticks stuck together", or "a pair of sweet potatoes stuck to the one root" (334–335). To achieve intimacy with the husband and to win approval from the parents-in-law, the bride must learn to control her tongue: "You must not be bad-tempered or show your anger./You must not have a temper like dry kindling or a fiery tongue" (lines 336–337).

The bride echoes her mother's valuation of her, "I am just like shellfish bought during the mouldy season/Or like wet cigarette butts." In another example she declares, "You've raised me, this young girl like the useless weeds that don't need water/Although now I've grown up I still do nothing for you" (137–138), and, again, "You have raised a daughter who is nothing but discount goods; I can do nothing for you" (162). The bride declares her ingratitude for the trousseau, painfully acquired by the family over many years: "Your daughter is [like] crow-plum soup with rice, black is my heart/I wash my face with scum from the wok, black is my heart" (230–231). She continually mocks her own limited intelligence and ability: "Dear Mother/You have disciplined and taught me/But I was born with fingers like a block of wood/And a stomach full of grease [that is, doltish]" (425–427).

Nonetheless, the bride's self-criticism has a hard edge to it. She subtly conveys that her *mother* has raised her to be "useless". Further, she accuses her mother of deceiving her about what she can expect in the groom's house: "Dear Mother, Stop saying all those fine-sounding words/those high-flown phrases, don't bother with those/Mother, and my seniors, speak words as plain as rice chaff in the stove" (115–117). She hints broadly at a need for a bigger trousseau in an implicit criticism of the paltry one laid out in front of her, which will surely be unacceptable to the groom's family. She also criticises the differential treatment of boys and girls in no uncertain terms:

> Dear Mother,
> You raise my younger brothers and sisters until they are old,
> But you raise me to twenty years and then send me away . . .
> When I was a young child, how you treasured and valued me . . .
> My dear mother, how you treasured and valued me!
> [In those days] you did not treat boys and girls differently,
> But today, as I stand on the plank [by the bed] you treat me differently from the boys—how unjust! (348–349, 354, 359–361)

Most important, the daugher continually constructs herself as a victim who is being sacrificed for the good of the family, but a victim whose very suffering creates indissoluble bonds of obligation on the part of her natal kin: "The mother of that family is notorious for bullying her daughters-in-law" (133); "I will pass my days in future as if living in prison,/Hoping that my brothers come to visit, so they will not be too strict with me,/Then their large and small sticks will stop beating me" (157–159); "When I am given to them, they'll look at me as I come and go with [cold] white eyes,/In the midst of their [cold] white eyes I will pass my life . . . (214–215); "When I am married off to that family, the Dama [older brother's wife] will cast sneering eyes at me,/And beneath her, the Ashen aunt [senior

aunt] will look askance at me,/They will sneer at me to 'instruct' me,/They will look askance at me to 'discipline' me./Mother,/But in reality they will sneer at me as inferior goods./They will look askance at me in order to make fun of me . . ." (388–393). She will be required to bear heavy burdens and fears that she will not withstand such harsh toil:

This young daughter is like a plank of wood,
This young daughter is just a girl of straw.
When the wind blows, it knocks me down,
When the rain falls, I melt away. . . .
(488–491)

Near the end of the mother-daughter dialogue, the mother makes a powerful response to the impassioned outburst of her daughter. The tone is no longer one of dialogue but of finality. This is the climax of the verbal duel presented in the dialogue. The mother reminds the daughter again that she was cherished just like a son when she was young. But now the time has come for her to be married. The relatives have gathered and the final bowl of rice is given to the bride before her imminent departure. Implicitly dismissing images of her daughter's frailty, the mother boldly tells her to wrest her rightful place in her new family:

Daughter,
When you live at their house, you must seize your own slice of Heaven and your own piece of Earth,
Steer the boat and wield the pole just like your father.
You too can open the door and lift the heavy grate just like your mother.
When you live at their house you will carry out [the barrel] of filth and do the dirty work.
But today a magical wind will bear our small daughter away . . .
(Filling the Box, 513–517)

The daughter is now empowered to take on the attributes of both her father and her mother. From now on she will metaphorically "wield the boat pole", just like her father, and will find the strength to do heavy domestic toil, just like her mother. Finally, the mother reminds the daughter of the father's ceaseless toil to raise her to adulthood.

Daughter,
Your father tills the field so that we can eat, he truly suffers.
He works from first light till the dark of night.
In this way he raised you, my small daughter. . . .
(Filling the Box, 520–522)

In spite of his toil, they are so impoverished that they have little for her trousseau.

> We did not call in the dressmaker to make you clothing,
> Nor did we call a barrel maker to make you barrels for your trousseau,
> Nor did we call in a carpenter to make furniture for your dowry,
> Nor did we order for you four kitchen goods and eight boxes of household goods.
> My young daughter, I ask you to forgive us.
>
> (Filling the Box, 527–531)

These poignant words bring to an end the first stage of the lament cycle.

Throughout the mother-daughter dialogue the daughter strives continually to use the moral leverage of a 'victim' to call for sympathy from the mother and others watching.[3] This could include the father, who is directly addressed at one point. Another possible goal of the bride is to enrich her trousseau. The mother has a different agenda. She seeks to undermine the bride's victim status by reminding her of the alleged wealth of the groom's home and of the daughter's deficiencies. The bride, for the most part, accepts the notion of the supposed wealth of the groom's family and echoes the mother's recital of her inadequacies. However, she denounces the rigorous protocols of the groom's home, the harsh labour she will be forced to undertake, and the scorn and mistreatment she will surely endure because of the paucity of her trousseau. She savagely criticises the value system that allows the parents to retain the "copper spoon" sons and send away the "bamboo sieve" daughters. To be killed at her birth would have been preferable to being raised, loved, cherished, and then bundled away.

This verbal duel is not won by either party. However, by the end, the bride has clearly demonstrated the eloquence and rhetorical skill that should enable her to "seize her own slice of Heaven" inside her new home in due course. It is within the context of this demonstration of female eloquence and protest that we should consider the constant iteration of images of female inferiority and abasement. The mother's apparent cold-heartedness and seeming denigration of her daughter could be understood as a function of the 'emotional economy' of a marriage system where young girls have only an insubstantial, temporary presence in their natal home.[4] A rhetoric of detachment provided an amelioration of the mother's painful dilemma. For her part, the daughter seeks to construct ties of sentiment and moral obligation to her natal family to counter the reality, which she never denies, of physical separation that is about to take place. She echoes the discourse of female inferiority taught to her by her mother but rails against it at the same time, using her alleged inferiority as an emotional weapon. Precisely because she is so weak, unskilled, and inadequate, her natal family has a doubled duty to protect her from abuse at the hands of her in-laws.

* * *

Neither of these competing voices replicate orthodox male discourse on the meaning of marriage, which sought to transfer a girl from the control of her father to the control of her husband and parents-in-law. One of the earliest formulations of what became the doctrinal construction of marriage for the bride is found in Mencius, pt. IIIB: "When a girl marries, her mother gives her advice, and accompanies her to the door with these cautionary words, 'When you go to your new home, you must be respectful and circumspect. Do not disobey your husband.' It is the way of a wife or concubine to consider obedience and docility *(shun)* the norm".[5]

Traditional teaching and motherly instruction concentrated on the inculcation of obedience *(shun)* in the bride.[6] In laments, the mother never uses the Confucian term *shun;* instead she tells the daughter to be resolved and stoic *(zhiqi)* and to adapt to her new surroundings, the better to win status in her new home. The major difference here seems to be that the former term directs the daughter-in-law to transfer her filial piety from her natal family to her husband's family, whereas the latter encourages her to stiffen her inner resolve to make the best of her new situation and aspire to playing a leadership role in her new family.

The lament repertoire is thus complex and contradictory. On the one hand, the daughter is told of her inferiority in no uncertain terms, on the other, the daughter rails against the unfairness of this while apparently echoing and accepting it at the same time. Both mother and daughter are in agreement that the marriage transaction involves the sale of the daughter's person to another family. However, the mother, at least in this regional tradition, declines to instruct the daughter in the Confucian protocols of wifely submission, preferring instead to arm her daughter with strategies and moral backbone to withstand adversity and aspire to an eventual matriarchal role in the family.

After the mother concludes her lament, it is the bride who takes centre stage. Next she says her farewells and thanks each member of her family in turn, particularly her older brother, his wife, and her maternal uncle. This is followed by the ceremonial laments performed at particular stages of her departure, such as the final bowl of rice, having her hair put up, stepping into the sedan, departing by boat, and the calling back ceremony. One of the most moving stages is when the *saosao* gives her a bowl of rice, the last she will have as a member of this household. She refuses it, because she is not allowed to eat or drink on this final day of departure.

The bride now sings the the lament called "A Bowl of Rice", which showers blessings on her natal family. A red veil covering her face is placed over her and she is carried, wailing furiously, to the bridal sedan by her older brother or male relative. The sedan, borne by the bridal party, is wheeled around the yard of the natal home several times. The bride, now ensconced inside the sedan with the curtains drawn, witnesses only a little of this ceremony. In Pan's lament she describes how she raised the cloth covering her face and peeked out furtively through the win-

dows, three sides of which had panes of "foreign patterned glass" (On the Bridal Sedan, 33). She is positive her appearance would shock the onlookers: "I look like a speckled duck—so hideous" (On the Bridal Sedan, 36).

The dowry is next placed item by item into the bridal boat and other accompanying boats. Once in the rocking boat, the bride realises the finality of permanent departure from her family. She glances through her red veil at the boat, looking for indications of the wealth of the groom. The boats of fine families would have a ceremonial rug, pennants, bridal umbrella, and a beacon on a bamboo pole (a custom believed to be derived from an ancient custom of taking the bride away at dusk). The clatter of cymbals and blare of suona horns and pipes add to the drama (On the Bridal Sedan 10:134–136). (In Pan's lament, she imagined a team of fine stallions had come to bear her away—an image that seems out of place with the reality, in this region, that she will sit on a bridal boat.) Accompanying the bride were the groom, a man to pole the boat, and the Fortunate Woman hired by the groom's side. As the boat departs, her brother *(ajiu)* stands on the bank and calls her back three times, in the "calling-back-the-sedan" ceremony (*wanjiao;* On the Bridal Sedan 55, 125).

The bridal boat would now travel slowly along the waterways and channels to the bride's new home, wending this way and that through the water channels, the dowry goods piled high for all to see. As the bride later comments: "The [groom's] family wants a good show, an elaborate display" (*yao hao kan, yao huamiao,* On the Bridal Boat: 1). On arrival at the groom's house she expects to see fine lanterns hung at the entrance and to hear the terrifying sound of firecrackers. In her mind's eye she pictures her trousseau on display in the marital bed chamber and starts to imagine the culmination of the marriage process and her final destination—the bed itself, enclosed by blue-patterned curtains and decorated with motifs of sons at play.

In Nanhui both families were assisted by their own Fortunate Women. The Fortunate Woman *(Xiniang)* was a married woman of the village who was regarded as 'fortunate' or 'complete'—that is, her husband and children were alive and the family was prosperous. This custom was found in many parts of China and dates back to the thirteenth century at least.[7] In Nanhui laments, the Fortunate Woman on the bride's side was addressed by the familiar title of "Mother" (Mama). She was a woman well known to the family. The bride referred to her as someone who had known her ever since the hair-cutting ceremony when she was only one month old. When the girl was seventeen or eighteen, the Fortunate Woman presided over the combing-up ceremony that indicated the girl was of marriageable age. The bride also referred to her as a "door-crossing Mama" *(mendu dama)*—that is, a mother who comes from outside but performs intimate roles involving her welfare. When relatives came in large numbers to see the bride *(dadui qinjuan),* the Fortunate Woman would receive the distant relatives while the bride would greet

her closest relatives. The Fortunate Woman was paid for her duties. However, the bride declares her family was so poor that the package of cash that should be set out for her on the altar table will not be paid at all. On the other hand, the groom's family will no doubt pay their Fortunate Woman such a large amount that it will require a huge willow basket to carry it. In this way the bride continues to reiterate the poverty of her natal home relative to the grandeur of the groom's. The presence of the Fortunate Woman is an example of the way in which women of the community, if deemed 'fortunate' in their family life and general prosperity, were able to confer blessings on the young bride. This was another role model to which the young bride could aspire in her turn.

Negotiating the Value of the Bride

Apart from reiterations of her poverty, the prime 'message' of the remaining lament material concerns the value of the bride. How much is she worth? What is the size of her dowry, how will it be regarded, and how large is the bride-price? Anxieties about these issues prey constantly on the mind of the lamenting bride. As she is aware, the process for the major mode of marriage involved lengthy negotiation by the two matchmakers from both sides. The various stages of the transaction in Nanhui were similar to those found in most regions of China, with the exception of the third stage, which appears to date from the late imperial era.[8] In her lament, the bride shows an acute interest in every detail of the marriage negotiations. The first stage was the matching of the horoscope containing the birth date of the bride with that of a prospective groom *(he ba zi)* by a fortune-teller to ensure there were no clashes of dates. The next stage was agreeing to the betrothal *(ding qin)* after negotiation with a matchmaker. This was settled by the acceptance of an initial bride-price from the groom. The third stage was known as 'agreeing on the day' *(hua hao ri)* or 'the daughter-in-law passing through the door' *(guomen xifu)* and involved the matchmaker taking the bride to the groom's house to meet the prospective in-laws. The groom returned the visit to the bride's home at a later date. After some coming and going between the two homes, the groom's family then proposed a marriage date and sent another lot of gifts, such as cash and jewelry. This stage violated the general precept that the bride and groom did not meet before marriage but was a local custom in marriage arrangements of the Pudong and Nanhui areas during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This local adaptation of the usual protocols, considered to be influenced by the more liberal customs of Shanghai, gave the two families time to weigh up the prospects of the match. It may even have given the bride a chance to have more say in the choice of marriage partner than one finds in other regions of rural China during this period.

The 'door passing' stage may even have led to the occasional rejection of the prospective groom after betrothal, an event that could trigger 'seizing of the bride'. The fourth stage was the arrival of the groom's party and the ritual departure of the bride. The final stage was the return by bride and groom to the bride's home on the third day after the marriage to pay their respects to her parents *(san zhao)*.

The lament cycle comments on many elements of this process, particularly the calling for the horoscopes, the successive payment of the bride-price, the negotiations with the matchmaker, and the preparation of the bride's dowry. However, the unusual third stage (the informal meeting between the bride and groom's families) is entirely absent in the bride's discourse on the marriage process. This is not coincidental. The lament corpus examined here would likely date from well before the coming of the new custom of 'door passing' in the late nineteenth century. Further, this stage would tend to mitigate the absolute nature of the bride's departure from her natal home and thus be out of keeping with the bride's fierce rhetoric of grievance. As discussed previously, the lament repertoire elided women's contribution to field labour, presumably because this did not fit the general understanding of 'women's work'. Once again we find that the lament discourse does not entirely match the contemporaneity of Nanhui marriage procedures as they had evolved by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but refers back to the idealised norms of the past.

As elsewhere in China, the role of the matchmaker *(meiren)* was fundamental to the marriage negotiation. These commenced when the father of the bride gave the matchmaker the 'eight characters' containing her birth date (Filling the Box, 480). The matchmaker would call on a fortune-teller to compare the two horoscopes. If five of the ten points matched favourably then the fortune-teller would declare the couple's birth signs suitable for marriage. In her lament the bride makes much fun of the hard time the matchmaker has in finding a family to accept the bride's 'eight characters'. It was customary for the written horoscope to be placed on the ancestral altar inside the house of the receiving family for three days. If no inauspicious events occurred during this time then the family would continue with negotiations. However, in the lament cycle the bride complains that the horoscope was "stuffed in a crack in the reed [lattice] wall" at the rear of the residence (Thanking the Matchmaker 1:20), an indication that it was not worthy of being placed inside the house.

In lament rhetoric, the alleged 'deceit' of the matchmaker was the butt of much comedy. The matchmaker, with her "oily mouth", exaggerated the appearance of the young woman, her manners and behaviour, and the huge size of her dowry, and sometimes even claimed that there was no need for a bride-price. In her 'thanks' to the matchmaker the bride had two radically different choices. One was a genuine thank-you to the matchmaker when the bride was tolerably

pleased with the arrangement (translated here as Thanking the Matchmaker 1); the other, a bitter curse, delivered when the bride was unhappy (Thanking the Matchmaker 2).

Both parents were engaged in marriage deliberations. In her sung instructions to the bride, the mother declares that she was unwilling to accept negotiations from noted wealthy families of the area such as the Zhong, Yan, Sheng, and Xi. Their own family is poor and ill-matched to marry into these wealthy families: "how could our lowly family serve as a big foundation stone" (Filling the Box, 270). Nonetheless, in contradiction to this, and in keeping with the charade of hypergamous marriage, the bride asserts that her parents have sought to "raise me up, to put me on high" (Thanking the Father, 83).

The critical factor in marriage arrangements was the relative size of the dowry and bride-price. It was the balance between the two that decided the bride's market value in the marriage transaction. In the laments, the dowry is usually called *peijia,* or occasionally *jiazhuang.* Gifts added to the dowry were called *renqing,* that is, objects expressing "human sentiment" (Thanking the Grandfather, 18). It was important that the dowry be as lavish as possible, both to give the natal family face and to ensure a welcome for the new bride. At the *pojia* the bride will be most concerned with the appraisal of her sisters-in-law, especially her Dama or the wife of the elder son of the household. The mother-in-law, surprisingly, was only rarely mentioned. It was the cool appraisal of the Dama and the more junior sisters-in-law *(ashen)* that really worried the bride (Filling the Box, 62–63).

On arrival at the *pojia,* the dowry was taken by the Fortunate Woman employed by the groom's side, laid around the ancestral altar for exhibition, and then displayed in the marital bedroom for all to see. On the third day after arrival, the bride's brother returned to take her back to her natal family for a visit. This is anticipated to be a time of resentment for the bride. Expelled from her natal home, she will surely feel wronged: "When I return to talk and eat with my family, I will feel so aggrieved" (On the Bridal Sedan, 60).

During the lament cycle the bride referred time and time again to the kind of items that ideally should be part of her dowry. The list was long: bedding and a mattress wrapped in ceremonial red cloth, silken coverlets, indigo blue shirts, "three new things and four old", a quilt of "foreign cloth" *(yangbu),* and an expensive satin quilt *(chou beitou).* Clothing included jackets of various patterns: a satin mandarin-style jacket, a large, red padded jacket with upturned hems, a green silk blouse. Household goods were very important: "four kitchen goods and eight boxes of household goods" *(si chu ba xiang).* Homes in the area were unheated, so the dowry should include a brass foot warmer *(huangtong jiaolu)* and a hand warmer. The foot and hand warmers contained hot ash from the stove.[9] A yellow copper foot warmer would be placed in the bridal sedan. Other items included face basins *(mianluo),* foot basins *(jiaotong),* and candle holders *(la[zhu]tai)* from

her father. The last are used in ancestral ceremonial, including (according to my informants) some private veneration of her own ancestors. This is why they are given to the bride by her father.[10] The dowry also includes pots of various sizes and types. The *tianyu* is a small pot with a large mouth used for sugared fruit, and the *beng* is a large bellied pot with a small mouth used for wine, vinegar, and soy sauce.[11] The dowry was bundled together and tied with ceremonial red-and-blue cloth. The bride expected that the in-laws would be deeply disappointed with her paltry dowry. Rich families expected to see four wardrobes, eight chests of goods, silk, brocade and leather goods, boxes with locks, and foreign cases with 'butterfly hinges', not to mention glamourous clothing for the bride.

As previously discussed, in the late imperial era and early twentieth century the bride-price was often very expensive and the groom's family would often be compelled to go into debt to repay it. In the lament cycle, the bride-price is depicted as paid by the groom's family largely in cash and is placed on trays of various sizes during the marriage negotiations. The first payment is large ("the large tray"), and the second payment is smaller ("the small tray"). The balance between the dowry provided by the bride's family and the bride-price paid by the groom's will determine the status of the bride. For example, if the dowry is very lavish, this will give the bride and her natal family a great deal of face. If, on the other hand, the bride's family has called for a large bride-price, then this signals a relative loss of face for the bride, as she is 'sold' rather than given away. If a large bride-price is accepted, then what should happen is that this money go to provide a more lavish dowry than would be possible otherwise. In the case of poor families, however, the bride-price is used for the necessities of life such as "oil, soy sauce and coarse rice cakes" (On the Bridal Sedan, 110).

The bride prefers to imagine that her father turned down the tray of cash from the groom's family (Filling the Box, 216–217), a notion thoroughly contradicted later by her mother, who claims that they are so poor they have asked and accepted one bag of gold, one bag of silver, head-piece jewellery, and "first meeting" cash, "welcoming money", foot basins, barrels, copper and tin vessels (Filling the Box, 235–239). The bride describes her parents as having painfully saved for her dowry for a long time. She contradicts this in a later lament, however, when she complains that her father took a large bridal-price and spent it all on everyday necessities instead of adding lavish items to her dowry. The size of both bride-price and dowry are interrelated in the bride's mind. Her preference was for a small bride-price and a large dowry. In this way she could exhibit her value and status to her new family.

* * *

As we have noted, one of the most important factors that shaped Nanhui marriage practices and the destiny of young women before the late nineteenth cen-

tury was the general shortage of marriageable women. When Pan learnt how to lament in the 1920s, the gender demographic of the region was more balanced than it had been a century before, but the repertoire she mastered reflected the understandings of earlier generations. In the rhetoric constructed in the lament and acquired by Nanhui women, a young girl growing up became aware that her family had made a choice to nurture her to adulthood. Boy children were indeed more valued, but at least her life had been spared at birth, she had been raised to puberty and was now being prepared for the most prestigious form marriage as someone's primary wife. Her lament performance was another way of making this status highly visible in her community.

The Nanhui bride was also very aware that boys were considered more valuable than girls. In spite of this, her strategy in the laments relied heavily on the notion that she herself was cherished by her family and, further, that she had a certain value in the marriage economy. She talked constantly of women as skilled in spinning, weaving, cooking, and housework. The bride's rhetorical self-denigration, a seeming requirement of the lament genre, revolved around notions of her market value—like "shellfish bought during the rainy season" or "wet cigarette butts". This discourse of female self-denigration was not unique to bridal laments and can be found in many Wu songs.[12] However, the bride's constant reiteration of the importance of women's labour also reminds her listeners that she is about to step into the role of a mature woman, wife, and mother, whose work will be indispensable to the fortunes of the family. Even the oblique reference to female infanticide in the lament reinforces the fact that her family chose to keep her, and do in fact cherish her. This apparent code of inferiority, ubiquitous throughout the entire cycle, could be understood as a way of highlighting the transformation from daughter to wife that is about to take place.

The discourse of "commoditization" in Chinese marriage (to use the words of Hill Gates) is well known in studies of the Chinese marriage system; but how the women concerned interpreted these exchanges is less understood. Gates argues that "[A]s objects for exchange, women could not be actors in exchanges" and thereby became "culturally invisible" in the marriage process.[13] The bridal lament was an interesting exception to the general 'invisibility' of Chinese women at the time of their marriage. It was precisely when her economic worth was most prominent in the family and community that the lamenting bride was able to publicly dramatize her 'value' as negotiated by both sides of the marriage transaction. Her favourite fantasy was that her parents would refuse a large bride-price (that is, not 'sell' her off) but provide her with a large dowry (thus demonstrating her value to them). In the lament, her mother would insistently point out exactly the opposite: that the family had been forced by poverty to accept a large bride-price and could only provide her with a meagre dowry. In real-life performance, the hyperbole of both positions would no doubt be obvious to the observers.

Beyond the discourse of female subordination, the bride also protested the dominant notion of marriage in imperial times and later—namely, that the bride was subject to patrilocal marriage and incorporation into the home of the groom. Aggrievedly, the bride compared the differential marital destinies of sons and daughters and protested the unfairness of her enforced removal from her family home. The sheer bluntness of these words of protest is very rare in Chinese literary genres, including women's literary poetry.[14] Her parents are called upon to explain why it is only their daughters they send away in marriage. Why are the sons allowed to stay home to be pampered by their mothers for the rest of their lives? What explanation can they give for the differential valuation of boys ("the copper spoon") and girls ("the bamboo rice sieve")? The bride's fierce questions in the lament remain unanswered, but the moral leverage she gains from the rhetoric of victimhood is clear. It allows her to make ongoing claims on her natal family. She will do this by calling on her older brother to protect her after marriage. In this way, her family can defend their honour by demonstrating that their women are valuable, even when married off.

The bride's complaint was expressed in pungent colloquial language designed to convince her audience of the palpable reality of her grievance. The sheer hyperbole of the lament repertoire, the twists and turns of the bride's 'argument', her flights of imagination, were not so much referential to any social reality as evocative of her emotional dilemma on departure from the home of her childhood. None of the bride's complaints could change the reality of patrilocal marriage, nor was this her intention. What the lament performance did do was to create an intensive dramatic setting where these challenges could be rhetorically deployed. In other words, the audience watches as the bride dramatises her 'resistance' to patrilocal marriage while the ritual of the wedding ceremony, taking place in front of their eyes, enacted its inevitability. As the price for her enforced submission, the bride sought to exact a rhetoric of family affiliation that would continue to protect her and her children after marriage.

Although the bride was most probably not an 'actor' in marriage negotiations—in fact, the lament repertoire constructs her as an aggrieved victim—nonetheless she was a highly articulate and emotionally charged 'commentator' on the marriage exchange and showed a keen interest in her constructed 'value'. This was evident, too, in the pride the young woman exhibited in her cotton handicrafts, so essential for the subsistence of the family and for the cash it provided. The young daughter's ability to perform moving laments was another touchstone of her talent and intelligence (in spite of her protestations to the contrary). Her protests about the assured cruelty of the *pojia* and the unfairness of the way she is thrust out on marriage, as well as her sorrow at leaving her loved ones, create a rhetoric of victimhood that she uses to intensify the emotional pitch of her performance, elicit the sympathy of her audience, and exert a moral leverage on her family.

Recent studies of the relationship between the natal family and their affinal ties have suggested that, in spite of the seeming 'permanence' of the patrilocal marriage system, the married woman often played an important role in forming new ties between the woman's natal home and the home of her husband.[15] This study of Nanhui laments suggests that the process of strengthening bonds between the two families began even before the bride left home. In Nanhui, the major object of the bride's lament was not her father but her older brother (or a suitable substitute) and his wife. At any rate, it was these two (the major inheritors of the family estate) who gave final approval to the dowry the bride took with her on marriage. It was the older brother whom the bride hoped would visit her and would maintain a protective interest in her future life. It was the brother's wife the bride hoped would welcome her on return visits to her natal family. In China's canonical tradition, these affinal ties tended to be invisible or marginalized. As Beverly Bossler notes, "the patrilineal/patrilocal ideology of Chinese kinship always acted to disguise the importance of affinal and natal-family relationships".[16] In practice, these ties were often a significant factor in family networking, although from imperial times it is the affinal ties of the elite that are best documented. One of the valuable aspects of bridal laments is that they explicitly articulate the ideal affinal relationship from the perspective of sub-elite communities, although the sheer urgency of the bride's imprecations hint at the difficulties of fulfilling this ideal in practice.

PART II

Lament Performance in China: History and Ritual

CHAPTER 5

Weeping and Wailing in Chinese History

> The wives of Huazhou and Qiliang were good at wailing for their husbands and they changed the customs in their states.
>
> —*Mencius* VI:B

The lamenters of Nanhui were the heirs to an ancient Chinese tradition of weeping and wailing for ritual and social effect. It is argued here that, although both men and women engaged in wailed performances, they tended to so in different contexts and for different purposes. Weeping and wailing performance stands out as a rare example of a performance art where women not only held the stage but were able to exert a quasi-magical power denied them in mainstream ritual culture. In Part II, I will seek to place the laments of Nanhui within the history of wailed performances since antiquity and the performance of lament traditions elsewhere in China. First, it will be necessary to identify a little-studied performance tradition known as *ku* (translated here as "weeping and wailing"), to trace its emergence in the Yellow River region and transmission to newly sinified regions of south China, and to survey the vast confluence of regional variations of *ku* traditions (primarily bridal and funeral laments) that developed over the millennia (Chapter 5). Bridal laments have generally been regarded as a wedding custom or a type of oral performance, and their ritual attributes have been overlooked. In Chapter 6 I shall assess the ritual attributes of bridal laments within the context of Chinese myths about the origins of laments, beliefs in 'marriage pollution', and the exorcistic power of weeping and wailing.

Weeping and Wailing in Chinese Antiquity

The origin of bridal laments, the history of wailed performances in China, and the generic characteristics of Chinese laments have been largely unstudied in the West.

However, Chinese language scholarship has long arrived at a consensus view that bridal laments are a remnant of practices of marriage by capture believed to have existed universally in antiquity during the transition from a matrilineal to a patrilineal society. Informed by Marxist social-science paradigms, Chinese scholarship holds that Chinese society, along with other developed societies, progressed from a state of matrilineality to patrilineality and thence by various stages to 'civilized' marriage.[1] According to this paradigm, marriage by capture arose from the need to procure wives from outside one's existing tribal groupings, thus giving rise to exogamous marriage and ultimately to a patrilineal and patriarchal social system.[2] According to Chinese social historians, bridal laments derive from the presumed era of marriage by capture and reflect the trauma women underwent at that time. Ye Tao and Wu Cunhao, who have written a monograph on the custom of marriage by capture in China, are representative of mainstream Chinese opinion: "One could say that from the time when marriage by capture became prevalent, bridal laments became a sorrowful custom where women bewailed their historical defeat".[3] An obscure passage in the Chinese classic *Book of Changes (Yijing)* is invariably cited to support this view. The passage apparently refers to a tryst where a woman weeps "bloody tears" as she is borne away by a robber groom.[4] I have argued for the specious nature of this evidence elsewhere, but there is no doubt that it has influenced Chinese views of the history of Chinese marriage and of the origin of Chinese bridal laments to the present day.[5] Contrary to the received wisdom, I believe that bridal laments emerged from ancient performances of weeping and wailing in Chinese antiquity combined with southern traditions of women's singing on marriage. The laments of Nanhui are thus best understood as a regional variant of a continuous tradition of wailed performance over the centuries.

In Chinese antiquity, weeping and wailing performances *(ku)* were associated with mourning for the dead, admonition, protest, and the propitiation of spirits. More than just an undisciplined outpouring of grief, the 'performance' of weeping and wailing could be appreciated for its aesthetic or even entertainment attributes. The most common type of wailed performance was carried out during mourning for the deceased. It was considered important that relatives wail at funerals so that the spirit of the deceased would know how to find its way home. For this reason, the canonical *Book of Rites* laid down stipulations for the act of *ku* by different levels of kin at specific times. The use of the word *ku* here, often translated as "crying" has led to confusion about the nature of these choreographed mourning performances. For example, Norman Kutcher, in *Mourning in Late Imperial China,* notes the ubiquity of what he calls "crying" in ritual texts. He adds "It seems almost inconceivable that emotions could be turned on and off. But *Family Rituals* is replete with such language. Almost every ceremony in the death ritual section of the book describes when crying is to take place, and who is to do the crying".[6] He wonders at the seeming lack of authenticity, of real felt emotion dur-

ing mourning. However, these instructions become more comprehensible when one interprets *ku* not as "crying" but as "wailing", as I have done here. While a display of tears signaled one's 'sincerity', wailing was the indispensable act, not tearful crying.

While both sexes engaged in mourning 'performances', these were governed by gender-specific protocols. According to the *Book of Rites:* "Immediately after death, the principal mourners sobbed *(ti);* brothers and cousins (of the deceased) wailed *(ku);* his female relatives wailed and stamped *(ku yong).*"[7] It is worth noting that the most histrionic form of mourning (both wailing and foot stamping) was reserved for women. An appropriate wailed performance was a sign of female virtue. This anecdote is told of Confucius, who passed by a woman wailing at a tomb: "Confucius leant over the crossbar of his carriage and listened to her".[8] He apparently approved of her performance. One of the most famous statements about lamenting comes from Mencius: "The wives of Huazhou and Qiliang were good at wailing for their [deceased] husbands *(shan ku qi fu)* and they changed the customs in their states".[9] By this he meant that the inner virtue of the women, their exhibition of loyalty to their husbands, was expressed in outward form by wailing, and this in turn set a good example for other women. Ritual wailing at funerals was governed by rules controlling the display of excessive or inappropriate emotion. For example, in one case a mother refused to wail ritually on the death of her son because of his alleged lack of virtue. Her son had encouraged an excessive display of grief on the part of his attendant women / wives,[10] and his action violated the requirement for a man to keep an appropriate emotional distance from his secondary wives.

Apart from wailing at funerals, the term *ku* was also used in ancient times to refer to a public performance involving the vocalization and dramatic enactment of emotion.[11] To perform *ku* was to express grief over death or misfortune, or to perform an act of ritualized protest. As demonstrated in the careful study of Christoph Harbsmeier, the term *ku* in antiquity referred to a solemn, sometimes ritual, act involving vocalization or speech but not necessarily wept tears. He distinguishes the term *ku* from the related term *qi,* which, he argues, referred to tearful weeping, with or without vocalization. The act of *ku* was a form of deliberate behaviour, whereas the act of *qi* was a spontaneous emotional reaction to an event.[12] Men were more likely to engage in *ku* protest performance, which often involved an element of physical suffering. One example from the historical record is known as 'crying at the Qin court' *(ku Qin ting).* Shen Baoxu, seeking to restore the state of Chu, implored the ruler of Qin for troops. When the latter proved reluctant, Shen set himself up outside the wall of the court and wailed loudly, not stopping day and night, and having no food or drink for seven days. The king of Qin was moved by this performance and went to rescue the Chu kingdom.[13]

Another form of *ku* protest, known as 'lamenting at the temple' or *kumiao,*

was an expression of political protest directed at the emperor. In the final years of the Ming dynasty it was performed by government students protesting against corrupt officials.[14] According to the study of Chen Guodong, the practice of *kumiao* could include the rending and burning of one's official robes and open lamentation and weeping in the courtyard or inside the local temple to Confucius. Bells and drums were struck to draw a large crowd. Chen concludes that this "had the implication of publicly denouncing criminal behavior".[15] Jin Shengtan (1610?–1661), a famous writer of the era, performed a temple lamentation during his protest against a corrupt magistrate in his home region of Suzhou. He was executed the same day.[16]

Occasionally one hears of women wailing in public as a form of protest or in domestic space as a form of private admonition. One ancient text relates the story of a man called Lu Wengong who killed his natural heir, the son of his wife, and established the son of his concubine as heir. In protest, his wife set off to return to the home of her birth in the state of Qi. She wept and wailed publicly as she passed through the streets of the township *(ku er guo shi)*. The townsfolk wept in sympathy with her, and in this way the iniquity of the husband became a public scandal.[17] Women could also use ku as a form of moral admonition, as in the example of a woman who condemned the behaviour of an unfilial son.[18]

Wailed performance was an aesthetic as well as a moral experience, and the manner in which ritual wailing was performed was an integral part of its efficacy. A striking example of the 'entertainment' attribute of wailing comes from Mencius. When the ruler died, the crown prince engaged in arduous mourning: "When it was time for the burial ceremony, people came from all quarters to watch. He showed such a grief-stricken countenance and wept so bitterly [*kuqi zhi ai*] that the mourners were greatly delighted [*diaozhe da yue*]".[19] In another example, a woman who had murdered her husband was heard wailing in the ritual manner. However, an observer detected the tone of fear in her wailing and she was arrested for suspected murder.[20] In an example from the *Book of Rites,* a man is said to "cry like a child" at the death of his mother. Confucius faults this behaviour because he is not following "the prescribed rules for wailing and stamping".[21] Some women became ritual specialists who performed weeping song rituals. One ancient text relates the story of a woman, Han E, whose song was said to be so powerful it could resonate amongst the town gates for three days. She is remembered for teaching the people of Qi how to sing wailing songs.[22]

In the popular imagination, wailing to express filial piety or fidelity could even exert a magical force. A story from the commentary to the *History of the Three Kingdoms* tells of a man named Meng Zong whose mother loved to eat bamboo shoots. In midwinter when none were available, Meng Zong went to a thicket of bamboo and wailed in disappointment. Suddenly bamboo shoots magically appeared, and he gave them to his mother.[23] From the fifth century comes the

story of the virtuous wives of Shun, the sage-king of antiquity. The two wives, both daughters of the earlier sage-king Yao, lamented so vigorously over Shun's dead body that their tears stained the bamboo, which accounts for the speckled markings on bamboo to the present day.[24] Ritual wailing was also included in ancient shamanistic performances. Female shamans *(nü wu)* were called on to carry out a wailing song *(ge ku)* to beg for mercy from the gods and spirits at times of great disaster.[25]

The power of a woman's weeping is essential to the development of the story of Meng Jiangnü, which has been retold in countless stories and plays.[26] In the telling of her story by Liu Xiang (79–8 BCE) in his "Biographies of Exemplary Women", he describes how Wife Qi, when her husband died in battle, carried his body to the city gates and "wailed over it" *(ku zhi)*. This would have involved wailing and vocalization as well as tearful crying. Passersby found her performance so moving they all wept with her in sympathy. After seven days, the city walls collapsed.[27] In the Tang period, the core story, now attributed to Meng Jiangnü, is transferred to a wife who travels to the site of the Great Wall to find her husband's body during the era of the first Qin emperor. She searches the wall to no avail; her wails resound to the heavens and the bricks mysteriously collapse to reveal the bones of her husband.[28] When performed in village plays of exorcism *(nuoxi)*, the tremulous "weeping song" of the heroine becomes integral to the ritual power of the play. In the village plays of Guichi, Anhui, for example, plays about Meng Jiangnü are so popular that another local name for these plays is *haotao xi*, or weeping and wailing plays.[29] Here, it is the histrionic weeping and wailing of the heroine that expels the demons of misfortune. Similar wailing performances were enacted in stories, novels, and plays such as the tale from the Three Kingdoms cycle known as "Weeping at the Ancestral Temple" *(ku zu miao)*, in plays such as "Weeping for [Li] Cunxiao", and in the Beijing opera "The Marks of Cinnabar".[30]

There are no examples of a bridal lament extant from antiquity. The Taoist text *Zhuangzi* contains the story of the pretty daughter of a border official who was married to the king of Jin. The narrative goes: "She wept till her robe was soaked with tears. But after she arrived at the king's residence, shared his fine bed, and could eat the tender meats of his table, she regretted that she had ever wept".[31] In this case, the word used for "weep" is *qi*, not *ku*, and it refers simply to her sobbing, not to a *kujia* type performance. Within the context of the *Zhuangzi*, one would expect this text to refer to Taoist quiescence in the face of the inevitable flow of life. However, this tale also seems to be an early example of a tradition of jokes aimed at satirizing the exaggerated crying of the bride at departure, and contrasting this with her pleasure once she realizes the sensual delights of marriage. We shall see more examples of these satiric stories below.

In spite of the absence of ancient records of bridal laments, it is apparent that the transmitted *kujia* type of performance belongs to a spectrum of prac-

tices involving the performance of weeping, wailing, and vocalized protest known since ancient times on Chinese soil. In contrast to their marginal role in canonical ritual, women played a predominant role in all types of wailing performance, from the funeral lament, to acts of remonstrance and protest, to shamanistic performances within their communities. The content of wailing performances was not prescribed in ritual instructional texts and the rules of performance were learnt by observation and oral transmission. Educated women admonishing wayward sons might well use the language of the rites taught to them from childhood, but uneducated women would have relied on the linguistic and artistic resources of the oral traditions of their native region, particularly songs of sorrow and grief. Records attest to the association of wailing performances with the enactment of exemplary virtue, magical power, and ritual efficacy. Men performed wailing to admonish their rulers, and women to admonish their husbands and sons. Both used vocalised wailing to exhibit moral superiority in the absence of political or social power.

The History of Bridal Laments

The earliest record of a bridal lament derives from the twelfth century and it relates to practices known only in the southern borderlands. From 1174 to 1189, official Zhou Qufei (Metropolitan Graduate of 1163–1164) travelled in the Guangnan region of Guilin Prefecture in south China. He subsequently wrote of the customs of this region, known as Lingnan, which encompasses the modern territory of Guangdong and Guangxi. He recorded a practice called "sending off to grow old together".

> In Lingnan, on the eve of the bride's marriage, the bride in full regalia sits in the main hall. Accompanying women, also in full regalia, are present to assist her. In turns they sing songs that are heart-rending and sorrowful, each exerting herself to the utmost. This is called *song lao* ("to send off to grow old"). It means to farewell the friends of one's youth and send the bride off to grow old [with her husband]. As for the songs sung, the people of Jingjiang rely on the tune "Sumuzhe"; the people of Qin [Qinzhou, the modern Guangxi, Qin region] use the tune "Renyue yuan" [Reunion Beneath the Moon]. These are all impromptu songs invented by themselves, not copies of past songs. Amongst these songs are some of excellent quality. The performances of *song lao* are all held at midnight. The men of the village all come to watch it. Sometimes the bride will begin to sing to the assembled group, teasing the women accompanying her. These women realize which one she is alluding to and that person sings in response to her. They often expose hidden matters. This can cause a quarrel, sometimes they tacitly agree with the bride.[32]

The Jingjiang area borders on regions where an ethnic group known as the Yao resided. Qinzhou is located in modern-day Guangxi.[33] Tan Daxian interprets the "hidden matters" as an exposure of the grievances of the bride towards her natal family. As for the tacit agreement alluded to in the final line, he believes this refers to family members giving in to the bride's requests.[34] This is another example where the lamenting bride could use her time in the spotlight to allude to personal grievances. This was true, too, of the Nanhui bridal lament. As one of the cadres in the Nanhui Culture Bureau told me, the bride likes to engage in *fanhua,* that is, to add a satiric remark or make a sly dig at the family members watching.

For Zhou Qufei, the custom of *song lao* was something new and unusual. He explains in his preface that he has titled his work "To Serve in Lieu of Response to Questions about Beyond the Ling [Mountains]" because he was continually asked questions about remote southern places he had visited.[35] The practice of *song lao* was one of the curiosities belonging to this distant southern outreach of the empire, which in Song times was populated mainly by non-Chinese people with 'exotic' customs.

Similar practices in southern regions like Guangzhou continued into the later imperial period. Huang Zou (1496–1566) recorded a custom called "song hall" or *getang:*

> There is an old custom that when a girl from the commoner classes gets married *(min jia funü)* that women gather together on mats and sing songs to farewell her. This is known as "the song hall". Although now it is starting to decline, there are still some villages that practice this custom.[36]

Men of letters continued to remark on the lamentation practices of the southern borderlands. The Lingnan poet Qu Dajun (1630–1696) reports that when a Guangdong woman is to be married off, "On the eve of the wedding the men and women get together for the ceremony, some of the relatives and those in attendance sing songs. This is known as *zuo ge tang* (sitting in the song hall).[37] Zhu Yizun (1629–1709) wrote in more detail of a performance of Guangdong "*getang* songs":

> In popular custom in the Yue [Guangdong] region they love to sing. The language is full of double entendres and the songs do not have to be refined, however, they are replete with emotion. On the eve of a woman's marriage, close relatives come around and sit on mats. This is known as 'sitting in the song hall'. One song goes as follows: "The pomegranate tree is awash with rain/Who can feel sorry for her red-[faced] tears". Another goes, "In the heart of the lantern two wicks are lit./The groom exerts himself to the utmost for the sake of the bride." The songs are extempore and fall into natural rhymes.[38]

This appears to be the same custom as the *song lao* mentioned by Zhou Qufei, but the performance mode is somewhat different. Instead of adlibbing songs to set tunes, as in the twelfth-century custom observed by Zhou, these seventeenth-century women sang popular ditties with double entendres. The pomegranate tree is a common fertility symbol in folk songs generally. The rain helps the pomegranate tree grow and also hints at sexual symbolism. Given the procreation to come, who can feel sorry for the tearful bride?

In the late nineteenth century a performance known as *song lao ge* was reported from Guangxi. This was very similar to the earlier reference of Zhou Qufei.[39] A similar custom was known in Hunan Province in the eighteenth century. The following record comes from the *Ningyuan fuzhi:*

> In Ningyuan custom, on the eve of a woman's wedding, wine and food are prepared and women assemble to sing songs. When the song is finished, the mother and all the aunts sob loudly with reverberating cries, one after the other in succession. They keep going until daybreak. I do not know when this custom began. In the Dao, Ning, Yong, Jiang, and Xin regions [in Hunan] it is all exactly the same.[40]

In the above report, the bride's mother and aunts are explicitly noted to take part in the singing and weeping. A similar practice of choral singing by women is mentioned in a poem by Peng Qiutan (fl. 1736–1795), acclaimed as an early "Tujia" poet. In a 'bamboo-branch poem' (ditty about his local area) entitled "Songs of the Ten Sisters" he wrote: "The songs of the ten sisters are so plaintive and sad / That other women stamp their feet in sympathy, their tears falling down their robes".[41]

Bridal Laments in the Lower Yangzi Delta

Records on practices in the lower Yangzi delta during the imperial era are harder to find than for the far south. However, anecdotes from the region indicate that the bride would complain, protest, and weep copiously at her impending marriage. Some of these cases were more elaborate than simply expressions of grief. In the Jiangnan region, literati writers liked to poke fun at the image of the naively weeping bride, who has yet to understand the physical delights of marriage. A collection of jokes, *Xiaofu,* by famed Ming author Feng Menglong (1574–1646), satirizes what would have been a contemporary practice where the bride weeps in vocal and histrionic fashion on departure from her home. In one example, the distressed bride enquires of her brother's wife about the origin of the marriage system. The sister-in-law reports that it was the Duke of Zhou who set up the institution of marriage. The bride promptly curses the Duke of Zhou. After one month

of marriage she returns to her natal home and asks her sister-in-law how she can find the Duke of Zhou. When asked why, the new bride responds that she wants to send him some hand-sewn shoes in gratitude.[42] The story of the Duke of Zhou and the grateful bride has been continually retold well into the contemporary era. Even in the late twentieth century this story was still used to explain that the bride is not in fact unwilling to marry, despite her tearful protestations.[43]

Some of the jokes in Feng's anthology refer explicitly to the theatrical and 'inauthentic' nature of bridal weeping. In "The Lost Sedan Chair Pole", the bride is just about to leave through the doorway and is protesting and weeping *(aiku)*. But on hearing that the pole for the bridal sedan chair cannot be found, still weeping, she promptly tells the bearers that it is behind the door.[44] In "The Rocking Boat", the new bride sobs so piteously at departure that the boat polers feel sorry for her and come to a halt. The bride responds, "I'll stick to my weeping and you stick to your poling—what's it to you?"[45] In another joke, the sedan chair carriers feel sorry for the weeping bride and offer to take her back home. The bride responds, "I won't weep any more".[46] These jokes point to a practice whereby the bride not only sobs copiously but also vocalizes her grievances in a more or less convincing manner.

A short story from the Ming period, "The Record of the Loquacious Li Cuilian" (Kuai zui Li Cuilian ji)[47] belongs to the same satirical context as the jokes in the *Xiaofu* but alludes to a more elaborate 'performance'.[48] Many details in this story satirize aspects found still in twentieth-century bridal laments of the lower Yangzi region. The story centres on the loquacious Li Cuilian, who is sent off to marry a man called Wolf. Throughout the tale, Cuilian declaims loudly in colloquial verse. Admonished by her parents not to talk too much, she responds with a lengthy protest about her many talents. When the parents retire to bed she harangues her brother and sister-in-law for leaving her with all the chores. The next morning, as she departs, she sets to weeping and recalls their care and nurture: "And teardrops wet through my scented silk handkerchief".[49] Next she rails at her paternal aunt and attempts to slap her for coming late. In the final obeisance to her ancestors, she wishes that the groom's family will die in three years and leave all the property in her hands. When offered the ritual bowl of rice on parting by the matchmaker, she curses the matchmaker, calling her a "bawd" and a "painted old bitch". She recalls how the matchmaker had falsely described the great wealth of the groom's home.

During the marriage ritual at the groom's home, Cuilian continues to disrupt the ceremony, to the consternation of his family. During the chanting of the ritual poem known as *sazhang,* said while scattering seeds symbolizing fertility in the bridal chamber, Cuilian hits the master of ceremonies with a rolling pin. The groom declares how unfortunate it is that he has married a "peasant woman" *(cun gu'er)*. The worst fears of her parents are realized. The groom's family denounce

her for not understanding the "family rites" *(jiafa)*. Once in bed, she at first threatens her husband with physical violence but then allows him limited "conjugal rites". One gathers she has succeeded in her goal of making her husband fear her.

As in bridal laments, Loquacious Li is given 'license' to perform her 'protest' to her seniors. However, the verse form used in "Loquacious Li" does not belong to *ku*-type performance genres.[50] Nor is weeping and sobbing a feature of her performance; in fact she spends most of her time arguing and boasting. In this comic parody of folk practices, Loquacious Li fails to elicit the sympathy of her fictive audience, which is always the goal of the lamenting bride. However, there are some broad commonalities between this story and the Nanhui lament. Both include cursing of the matchmaker, admonition of the parents, and criticism of individual family members. The bowl of rice offered Li Cuilian on departure parallels a similar custom in Nanhui in the twentieth century. The dialogue between the parents and Cuilian is also reminiscent of the content of Nanhui *kujia*. The groom's family is described as affluent with many servants, and the parents worry that the daughter will not understand the protocols appropriate to living in such a wealthy establishment.

Another point in common is the bride's reliance on her older brother, which we have noted as an important aspect of kinship in the lower Yangzi delta region. Cuilian, when under attack, threatens to call on her older brother to defend her. Further, Cuilian's behaviour is considered to be that of an ignorant village wench. However, once transported to the groom's household, the Nanhui bride would not be in a position to talk back to the master of ceremonies, the groom, or his family. The ending of the Ming story, from the perspective of the Nanhui bride, is highly improbable and could be understood as a comic invention of the author. The publication of this story in the mid-sixteenth century could well be an indication that bridal laments were already known around the lower Yangzi delta, where Hong Bian was active.[51] The popularity of this tale, along with the comic anecdotes reported by Feng Menglong, indicate that bridal laments may have been prevalent in the lower Yangzi delta region in the sixteenth century.

In the pre-modern era, the lament practices about which we have most information all come from southern and coastal China: Guangxi, Guilin, Hunan, Guangdong, and the lower Yangzi delta. These traditions continued well into the twentieth century. From the historical record, it appears that laments developed from weeping and expressions of grief, to ritualized singing, sung admonitions by the mother, and, in regions with a history of dialogic and choral songs, the active participation of women friends and relatives. By the twelfth century, laments had already become a specific ceremony in parts of south China that had long-standing traditions of women's song performance. Some laments relied on tunes generally current in the culture of the Chinese heartland, while others relied on local tunes and the material included double entendres and sexual allusions. Sources

stress the extempore nature of the lament, as well as the emotional power of the performance, in which feelings of grievance dominated. In anecdotes and fictional stories written by educated men in the late imperial era, the loquacious, weeping bride was the butt of comedy, but did not appear to threaten the social order.

Lament Traditions in Twentieth-Century China

In order to understand more about the function and performance of lament traditions within their regional contexts, one must turn to remnant traditions in the twentieth century. In this section I will draw mainly on the work of Chinese scholars or cultural cadres working in anthropology, folklore, or regional cultures and augment these secondary studies with experience drawn from the Nanhui lament tradition. During the early socialist and Cultural Revolutionary period (1949–1976), 'feudal' practices such as laments were suppressed in both Han and non-Han communities across China. For this reason, the Chinese-language studies cited here have been published over the last two decades and deal with either dying or re-emerging traditions. The authors tend to treat laments as either a quaint survival from the old 'feudal society' or as an 'exotic' phenomenon practiced by non-Han Chinese peoples.

In twentieth-century China, bridal laments amongst populations designated Han Chinese have been noted in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, the Shanghai hinterland, Shandong, Zhejiang, Anhui, Guangxi, Sichuan, Fujian, Hainan, Hubei, Hunan, and Taiwan.[52] Although most modern sources claim that bridal laments were once practiced all over China, the practice appear to have been less prevalent in the Yellow River region, at least in the twentieth century.[53] Bridal laments are also common amongst a large number of designated 'minorities' in the western borderlands or in the south, including the Muslim Salar of Qinghai, the Miao of Guizhou, the She of Fujian, the Yao and Zhuang of Guangxi, the Sani of Yunnan, the Tujia of Hubei and Hunan, and the Kazakhs of Xinjiang.[54] In Inner Mongolia, the bride must weep on departure in a wedding ceremony that involves a masquerade "seizing the bride".[55]

Characteristics of Chinese Lament Traditions

In spite of the often artificial distinction drawn between Han and non-Han Chinese lament traditions by Chinese ethnographers, the bridal laments of both Han and non-Han populations share similar generic characteristics and belong to the same type of folk performance genre. The most studied lament traditions are those of the Hong Kong and New Territories, the Tujia people of the upper Yangzi,

and the Han Chinese of the lower Yangzi delta. All known lament traditions have significant shared characteristics that will be examined here, pointing to a shared history and, perhaps, a common origin in the ancient performances of weeping and wailing across the Chinese landmass.

First, bridal laments are a performance by women for an audience comprising mainly other women, although in some cases men formed part of the audience (for example, in Shanghai and environs, and in the Hong Kong New Territories). Ruth Yee reports that Tujia men did not listen to laments.[56] The lament was performed principally by the bride, sometimes with her mother and sisters, although in Sichuan and south China, she was assisted by her female relatives and friends. Laments are sung over a lengthy period, ranging from around three days in Shanghai to several months in the case of the Tujia.

Second, in all known traditions, the lament cycle comprises specific stages, which must be performed at particular times in the ceremony for the departure of the bride. These stages vary somewhat from region to region. The Tujia lament, for example, includes a segment called "farewell rice", which offers a blessing similar to that of the Nanhui lament.[57] In the Hong Kong New Territories, the bride began her lament when secluded in a loft with her girlfriends and laments were carried out as part of a process of purifying the bridal dowry.[58] At dawn she would utter the "beginning song", which alludes to the rosy clouds of sunrise:

> Opening the mouth—
> Red fish scales appear in the Eastern Sky.
> Opening the mouth to call—
> The grass at the corner of the field,
> May it blossom and bear seed,
> And cover the ground with red.
> Opening the mouth—
> And call the grass at the corner of the field;
> May there be autumn rains
> And abundant crops.[59]

The Nanhui laments, too, begin instead with sunrise imagery in the very first line:

> [*Mother to daughter*]
> Daughter,
> You must always be like the newly rising sun, like the sky born anew.
> Once you change your household, you must learn how to follow their ways.[60]

These two regional lament traditions, geographically very far apart, begin with the auspicious symbol of the rising sun. Apparently this was a conventional

element derived from earlier forms of lament. Sichuan laments also begin with sunrise imagery. The bride must begin lamenting before dawn, because if she fails to wake in time the cock's crow will swallow her lament and she won't be able to perform. The Sichuan bride begins with these words:

> Like new-made scissors, open for the first time,
> This girl begins to sing, but the sound is faint,
> When you cut with new scissors, both sides are blunt,
> This girl begins to sing, but the sound is mute.
> One gold cock begins to crow, then follow all the rest,
> This girl begins to sing, but she is on her own,
> The gold cock crows to bring on the morning light,
> This young girl sings out to make the people grieve.[61]

All lament traditions proceed in stages over a period of days. In Sichuan these include the plucking of the bride's fine facial hair and her hair combing ("Hair Plucking"), putting on the bridal regalia and bridal cloth ("Putting on the Wedding Costume"), and so on.[62] In Jiangyong County, Hunan, the first day is called "Sorrowing in the Room", the second day "Minor Songs in the Main Hall", and the third day "Major Songs in the Main Hall".[63] The Zhuang people of Guangxi have a rich cycle of *kujia,* including "Instructions to the Bride", "Cursing the Matchmaking", and "Cursing the Husband".[64] The Han Chinese in Guangxi incorporate *kujia* similar to the Zhuang in their own wedding ceremonies, including songs during the hair-putting-up ceremony, laments to parents, lament on getting into the bridal sedan, curse of the matchmaker, and so on.[65]

With regard to content, all bridal laments express the bride's sorrow at leaving her home and friends, her anger at being sent off to a distant village, and fears about the future. She may well liken her departure to death, or even that she is like a pig being led to the slaughter.[66] She calls on her older brother or senior male relative to continue to visit her and protect her, and will generally curse the matchmaker for her duplicity and lies. Laments contain a 'message' that Chinese scholars have interpreted as a protest against the patriarchal nature of the kinship system, as the product of endemic discrimination against women, or even as a form of proto-feminism.[67] The bride will commonly question why her parents treat her as inferior to her brothers. She points out that she too has worked hard for the good of the family and deserves to be retained, not sent away. She expresses fear of the cruelty she expects at the hands of the parents-in-law and condemns a system that sends her away but allows her brothers to remain for life. She seeks to tear away the elaborate facade of the traditional marriage process and expose it as the simple sale of her person for monetary gain.

The Hong Kong Yuen Long laments frequently use the imagery of a 'captured'

bride and of a violent battle between her natal family and that of the groom. The bride calls on her family to 'save' her from the 'invading' groom and his kin. She likens herself to the famous beauty Wang Zhaojun, who was given to the 'barbarians' in appeasement, and also to women warriors of the past such as Mu Guiying and Fan Lihua.[68] Similar ideas are known in other regional traditions such as the Tujia laments that refer directly to people coming to "seize" *(qiang)* the bride.[69] In a number of Han and non-Han communities, wedding customs involve masquerades of a pitched battle between the bride's and groom's families.[70] Wedding songs allude to the same idea, for example, one known as "Blocking the Door" *(lan men),* where the bride's family pretend to block the door to the groom's party.[71] These masquerade abductions and some of the imagery of *kujia* songs have helped to confirm the standard Chinese scholarly view that bridal laments are inextricably bound to marriage by capture. At any rate, the Nanhui laments do not rely to the same extent on the imagery of capture, although, as we have seen, the bride does refer to life at the groom's home as a sort of imprisonment where she will be beaten and tormented by his family.

A noticeable aesthetic characteristic of laments is the prevalence of plant or natural imagery to refer to kinship ties. Particular kin are associated with certain plants. For example, in Yuen Long laments, the grandmother is associated with the osmanthus flower; her kindness wafts over the bride like rich osmanthus scent.[72] The older brother is identified with the *baihua* (white flower), symbolizing filial piety and purity of intention.[73] The bride associates herself disparagingly with the cut-rate wild grass used for fuel[74] and also with a flower whose popular name is "the pregnant flower".[75] Similar plant imagery abounds in Nanhui laments. The groom's family are likened to the tenacious tendrils of the muskmelon in their ability to make prestigious social connections (Filling the Box, 79). The paternal grandfather is tied to his granddaughter like the tough fibres of a sweet potato (Thanking the Grandfather, 1).The authority of the maternal uncle in the family is represented by the cockscomb flower with its needle-shaped leaves pointing upwards (Thanking the Uncle, 1). The bride refers to herself as "discount goods" as worthless as the cheap shellfish sold during the "mouldy season" (rainy season), and elsewhere declares she is as frail as "a girl of straw" (Filling the Box, 489).

Laments do not appear to have fixed endings but simply draw to a close when the performer needs a rest or it appears that enough has been said. A 'session' comes to a natural conclusion determined by the specific context rather than any fixed generic principles. For example, the final lament translated here, "The [Groom's] House", comes to an abrupt halt at an obviously comic moment, when the bride bemoans her inability to make edible rice—presumably because the performer chose to stop at this moment. Some laments appear structured in a particular way; for example, the mother-daughter dialogue in the Nanhui lament reaches a moment of climax when the bride emits a violent outpouring of grief.

This emotional high tide ebbs to a moving denouement where the mother appears to seek forgiveness from her daughter.

The lament can be sung in different ways. The bride 'learns' her repertoire and the formulae of her own regional tradition, but she improvises during her performance. From the age of puberty, she will observe bridal lament performances and, as her own time nears, will seek out an older woman to teach her how to perform.[76] The various performance modes of laments tend to reflect the different languages and popular songs of each region. The Nanhui, Sichuan, and Shanghai laments have sung lines of irregular length. Some lament modes are composed in very colloquial language, with no literary allusions (Shanghai, Nanhui, Sichuan), but others have regular heptasyllabic line length and classical allusions (Hong Kong New Territories). The Tujia laments of Hubei and Hunan involve choral singing by groups of women and have distinct musical features that are perceived to be different from other Tujia songs. The dirge-like mode is known as "the sorrowful mode" *(beidiao)*.[77] Ruth Yee notes that the musical pattern of repeated triple quavers is a common feature of laments and other Tujia songs and occurs in the ceremonial music of the village plays of exorcism *(nuo)* plays.[78] Each line is complete in itself, the language is easy to understand, and lines can be linked together to form a long song of variable length. The typical Tujia lament begins with an address to a kin; next follows a lyrical expression of grief, then a concluding song that includes actual weeping. As in other regional traditions, there is no musical accompaniment. Tujia laments are thus a composite of song, speech, and weeping.[79] The weeping is contained within the musical unit in the form of "wept syllables" *(kutan chenju)* added to the melodic line. This type of song style is known as a weeping pitch *(kuqiang)*. It is composed in a basic metre of four or sometimes six syllables to a line with an irregular number of 'padding syllables'. Many lines begin with a direct address in a high pitch, as in "My sister", and then culminate in an expression of sorrow as the singer draws in her breath and sobs.[80] The 'sisters' closest to the bride sing in a very low pitch with a quavering timbre *(dou yin)*, but the older brother's wife *(saosao)* responds with a stronger voice and words of encouragement.[81]

Southern lament performances often involve the participation of groups of women engaged in choral singing. This is true for the "Sitting in the Hall" performances prevalent in the twentieth century in Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan, and Guangdong.[82] In Jiangyong County, Hunan, the Fortunate Woman is called in to coordinate the ceremony and lead the singing.[83] The Tujia of Hubei have a custom known as "The Accompanying Ten Sisters" *(pei shi zimei)* involving ten unmarried girls who come around on the eve of the bride's departure. They surround the bride, who sits in the middle of the main room of the house, and sing to her in order of rank until dawn on the eve of her departure. Ruth Yee notes that the musical mode of the "Ten Sisters" is quite distinct from that of the bride's lament, with

a more strongly defined melody and a broader content. Further, there are no wept lines as in the sobbing of the bride's own lament.[84] In other traditions, however, female relatives observe but do not accompany the bride in her lament.

Laments of the Pearl River Delta Region

The laments of the Pearl River delta have been investigated over the decades by a number of scholars. Since this is the best-studied tradition in the West, I will discuss their findings at some length. The earliest work on the subject is by Cheung Ching-ping, a native of the Punti region of Yuen Long in the Hong Kong New Territories. Cheung (sometimes written Chang) elicited lament songs from women of his acquaintance and transcribed some lament material from actual performance over a two-year period in the 1960s. Cheung's transcriptions have been used extensively by Rubie S. Watson and Yuk-ying Ho in their studies of bridal laments. However, as I discuss here, Yuen Long laments are not particularly representative of lament traditions known elsewhere in China. Cheung's lament material is much more literary in style than the Nanhui, Sichuan, and Tujia laments.[85] Cheung even refers to them as "literary-style folk songs" *(wenyan shi de minge)*.[86] He found that the women practitioners he interviewed in the 1960s had forgotten all but a few fragments of lament material.[87] After two years of work and interviews with many informants, he only managed to compile approximately 450 lines of bridal laments. This compares with the over 1,500 lines of bridal laments collected from a single Nanhui woman, Pan Cailian, in the 1980s.

The Yuen Long laments are composed in seven syllables to a line, are strictly rhymed, and are full of imagery, poetic devices, and allusions to historical personages. They also include set pieces involving medicinal herbs of a type known as early as Tang Dunhuang manuscripts. Some laments include complicated puns and metaphors based on the component parts of characters, in line with games known as *chai zi* (breaking up characters).[88] The Nanhui, Sichuan, and Tujia laments, by contrast, are highly colloquial and irregular. Although rich in folk imagery and symbolism, there are very few references to anything belonging to written culture, much less literary allusions or puns presupposing character literacy. Cheung noted that it took a long time for the women to memorize laments in Yuen Long. According to his account, girls were taught laments by older women in "girls' houses", where unmarried girls were sent at nighttime once they reached puberty.[89]

Two decades after Cheung's pioneering study, Chan Wing-hoi, who grew up in a Hakka village in the Hong Kong New Territories, completed an M.A. dissertation on Hong Kong folk songs. His unpublished study was much larger in scope than that of Cheung and covered all three major population groups in Hong Kong:

the Punti, Hakka, and Tanka. It also encompassed a much larger expanse of territory.[90] The Yuen Long region studied so intensively by Cheung was included in this survey. Chan researched his target area in a period of several months in 1983. A generation before, Cheung Ching-ping had been able to hear many actual performances in traditional contexts, but by 1983 the songs were no longer part of a living tradition, and Chan could only elicit performances from informants in non-traditional contexts. He was also able to take advantage of manuscripts of songs and laments in active circulation in the 1980s.[91] (In his 1960s study, Cheung never mentions any manuscripts, much less printed sheets, in circulation in Yuen Long.) Chan concluded that there were two types of laments in rural Hong Kong: one learned by rote that deployed more formal language (he called these "abstruse"), and another type of more colloquial song that was flexible and mainly improvised.[92] He concluded that the Yuen Long laments studied by Cheung belonged to the "abstruse" type and were similar in style to literati ballads of the region.

> The ballads, generally believed to have been composed by the literati, borrowed many expressions from the classical written language. Punti laments made extensive use of more or less the same lettered expressions . . . nobody composed new laments, either as improvisation in the course of singing or prior to performance. They explained that it was because of the abstruse language.[93]

According to Chan, it was the existence of girls' houses, supervised by senior women of the village, that made it possible for the girls to spend a lengthy period of time memorizing these "abstruse" songs.[94] The singing of abstruse songs thus did not depend on literacy or even cultural knowledge. There were many cases where singers were ignorant about the historical personages (known in the popular idiom as "the Ancients") who featured in their songs.[95] According to Chan,

> In the Mountain Songs and women's ritual laments of the local singing traditions, there were many references to the Ancients, and in all cases the songs were considered superior by virtue of those references. But when I asked for explanations, it often turned out that the singers knew little about those personalities. Miss Tsang of Tung Tau Tsuen knew almost nothing about the Ancients of whom she sang, except the very brief descriptions in the same lines where the references were made. But she was obviously proud of the fact that she could sing those lines, because, she said, those personalities appeared in books and operas, and even on the television.[96]

Chan concludes that "the sole significance of the references to the Ancients was in knowing those prestigious lines and names rather than their meaning".[97] Chan also provides an interesting explanation of the value and function of 'literary' songs. His informants told him that formulaic, non-extempore songs caused

less conflict than those which were flexible and improvised. In fact the higher the level of improvisation, the more likely they were to cause offence. According to one (male) informant, women singers of the improvised laments used this genre "to complain about their unfair share of ancestral estates, their current poverty, and conflicts". He added that extempore songs "typically caused conflict, and often ended in fights".[98] Even the feature known as "breaking up characters" apparently related to the use of symbolic tactics to deflect criticism. For example, one such line referring to a written character went as follows: "Two pots of lotus flowers to match one flower basket" (that is, a man who had two wives). According to a Mr. Ma, Chan's informant here, "if any of these songs annoyed somebody, the singer could defend himself and retort by saying that, 'I was singing about the written characters only' ".[99]

This gives us an insight into why the women of Yuen Long were so proud of their "abstruse" songs, so painfully acquired in the girls' houses. These songs gave the women a kind of 'social capital', by associating them with the cultural codes of prestigious written culture, whatever their actual knowledge and education. Furthermore, the memorized "abstruse" songs added solemnity and dignity to the ceremonies of weddings and funerals, without the social risks attendant on the potentially explosive extempore repertoire. The Nanhui, Sichuan, and Tujia laments belong to the more colloquial or improvised style. The Yuen Long laments, with their "literary" quality, appear to be somewhat exceptional in lament traditions generally. It appears that women borrowed "abstruse" material from local ballads that in turn derived from the written tradition. Cheung's difficulty in collecting laments from a large number of women in the 1960s, compared with the ease with which the much lengthier repertoire of Pan Cailian was recorded two decades later, is an important indication of the complexity of the Yuen Long repertoire. It was difficult to learn, hard to comprehend, and easy to forget. The Nanhui repertoire, on the other hand, was composed more or less extemporaneously on the basis of a learned repertoire of formulaic utterances and clusters of motifs linked together in a chain of association. These laments were taught during the course of labour in the cotton fields, or spinning and weaving in the outer courtyards, not in intensive fashion in 'girls' houses'. It was thus essential that the repertoire be easy to acquire and remember.

Chinese folklorists define Chinese folk arts in terms of their formal characteristics, such as song tunes, melodic suites, line length, rhyming patterns, and so on. However, in the case of the Chinese bridal lament, the regional repertoire of the region determines the linguistic and melodic mode, which is highly variable. What laments share is a common performative context (a woman about to get married and an audience of her kin and friends) and the notion of a staged performance encompassing varied elements over a lengthy period of time. As we have seen, regional lamentation traditions borrowed creatively from the type of material in

oral circulation in the relevant region: folk ballads, literary ballads, popular tunes, and love songs. Thus, women in Yuen Long borrowed from the more prestigious "literary" ballad forms of that region, while in Nanhui women transmitted songs of a more colloquial and improvised quality, drawn from the characteristics of Wu songs generally. In the same way, the "sending off to grow old together" songs from the twelfth century described by Zhou Qufei used songs to set tunes popular in that era. But even when a set tune was used, the women would creatively refashion these, even to the point where the expression of a personal grievance or exposure of a family secret caused offense or gave rise to a quarrel. In this regard there is surprising continuity between the laments observed by Zhou in twelfth-century Guangxi and the "impromptu" category of laments that led to village squabbles in the 1980s study by Chan Wing Hoi. In seventeenth-century Guangdong, the practitioners presumably borrowed some of their material from erotic songs and included double entendres based on complex verbal play in their laments. Tujia women imitated songs belonging to the region as a whole, including funeral songs of exorcism.[100]

Variation in poetic imagery and song type across regions is due to the accommodation of the basic lament tradition with different regional languages, song traditions, and wedding customs. For example, the images of capture, daughterly filial piety, and fertility, which figure more strongly in Yuen Long laments, might have derived from the "literary" ballads of the New Territories region. Strikingly absent in Cheung's collection of Yuen Long laments is the curse directed at the matchmaker. These curses are found frequently in Chinese lamentation traditions, including those of the Hakka women of Sai Kung in the New Territories studied by Blake,[101] and are prevalent in popular culture generally. The absence of a curse directed at the matchmaker could be a factor of the more formal-type verse style of Yuen Long laments. Colloquial vitriolic curses may have seemed inappropriate to the "high" or "bookish" style chosen by practitioners in Yuen Long.[102]

It is significant that lamenting practitioners in Nanhui do not understand their performance as a "song" *(ge)* much less as a "ceremonial song" *(yishi ge),* the category in which they are placed by modern scholars. They interpret their own practices as a type of "wailing" *(ku).* The same phenomenon has been noted for the Tujia community of Western Hubei, in the study of Yee and the Hong Kong New Territories by Johnson.[103] Yee considers that, for Tujia women, the word "song" *(ge)* refers to a sung form that seeks to entertain and has a strong melody.[104] *Kujia,* with their burden of grievance and grief, cannot be a *ge* by definition. The lack of a sense that *kujia* is a song performance would also help to account for the lack of any fixed verse or melodic form as a generic component of lamentation traditions. If a bridal lament is not considered to be a specific song form as such, then the performer is free to choose and adapt familiar song forms as she pleases.

Chinese scholars have often presumed an association between the severity of

'feudal' patriarchal practices and the prevalence of bridal laments. I shall briefly discuss this issue with regard to the laments of the Tujia people of the upper Yangzi River, a tradition flourishing to the present day. Before the removal of rule by tribal chieftains *(tusi)* in the modern-day Hunan region, and the establishment of administration by officials in the early eighteenth century, Tujia marriages were relatively free and women were allowed their choice of spouse. The Qing government imposed strict measures concerning even such things as hair length and costume, with specific rules for both men and women. The Qing also sought to instate arranged marriages, thus removing female choice in marriage, and did not permit the cancellation of betrothals.[105] The grievance content of Tujia laments, particularly the cry for equal treatment with men, is generally seen as a reflection of the imposition of Confucian values from the eighteenth century on.[106] However, as I pointed out earlier, the eighteenth-century local poet Peng Qiutan alluded to sorrowful choral singing during village wedding ceremonies. From the perspective of the general history of Chinese wailed performance, lament performance in the upper Yangzi almost certainly predated the sinification of the people now known as Tujia and could be understood as emerging from the rich dialogic and choral song tradition of south and southwest China, which included courting and wedding songs.

* * *

One could conclude that as a folk genre, Chinese bridal laments have some unusual characteristics. One notes their gender specificity (exclusively performed by women) and context specificity (they are performed at conventional times in the departure ceremony). Unlike Chinese opera and storytelling modes, song types or metrical features are not a defining element in the lament as a genre. What is important in *kujia* practices is that the focus be on the vocal expression of grief in a sung or wailed poetic mode, and that the performance elicit actual weeping on the part of the bride and her audience. The social and psychological effects of bridal laments have been much commented upon in the scholarly literature. They are seen as a rite of passage for the young woman as she prepares to transform herself from a daughter into a daughter-in-law. The lament offers her a 'license' to speak freely denied her at other times and allows the bride to express her natural sorrow at leaving her natal home, to demonstrate filial piety to her parents, and to exhibit her vocal talents and wit. The mother has the opportunity to 'instruct' her daughter, using the coded language of the lament and in this way to carry out her motherly obligations. The lament, considered as entertainment, adds spice and drama to the wedding ceremony, demonstrates the bride's talent and eloquence, and helps consolidate her ties with her kin. These elements are evident in all regional traditions.

I would add to this picture the observation that many lament traditions also

have a little recognized ritual aspect. The Tujia lament, for example, includes an invocation to the spirits of the ancestors. Yee sees parallels between dramatic segments of the lament cycle and local song and dance rituals, designed to "please the spirits" *(yushen)*.[107] Lament traditions often contain formulaic language charged with ritual import. The opening invocation to the sunrise is an auspicious image for the transition to come, and the bowl of rice song contains a magical blessing for the family. Similarly, the bride can choose, if she likes, to set a powerful curse on the matchmaker. These are all indications of the lament's potential for ritual efficacy, a subject discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

Shaking Heaven

Laments and Ritual Power

In this chapter we return to the intriguing saying with which we began this study: "At the home of the bride, they weep and wail till Heaven resounds,/At the home of the groom, their property swells and grows by bounds." This Nanhui saying calls on the bride's family to make a public, sustained performance of weeping and wailing in order to convince the heavens of the sincerity of their grief. In this way Heaven would take pity on them, the demons of misfortune would be kept at a distance, and, corresponding directly to the histrionic force of the lament performance, the home of the groom would prosper. Nanhui women believe that one laments in order to banish noxious forces *(huiqi)* and ensure good fortune for both families. The lament as ritual, then, is reminiscent of Victor Turner's notion of "rites of affliction", which seek to ward off the evil influence of malevolent spirits seeking to inflict suffering on human beings.[1] The intention is not so much to propitiate the spirits as to resist their relentless evil with a countervailing force of equal power, and in that way bring about good fortune.[2] A belief in the moral nature of the cosmos and the perceived need to propitiate the deities and exorcise the forces of disaster comprised an intrinsic part of ancient Chinese culture and have endured through to the modern period in a multitude of popular practices.[3] However, China's ritual culture, including its practices of exorcism, is perceived as dominated by male ritual specialists, usually armed with well-thumbed sacred texts.

In Confucian societies, women played only a modest role in the archetypal ritual of Chinese culture—that of ancestral veneration. Women's memoirs dating from the first half of the twentieth century are full of poignant anecdotes about the pain of their exclusion from ancestral ceremonies.[4] Women maintained domestic shrines to deceased forebears and prepared the sacrificial foods, but were usually not admitted to the lineage hall where the chief ancestral rituals took place.[5] As Steven P. Sangren has pointed out, "Daughters are denied recognition of legiti-

mate agency in patrilineal ideology, especially in ritual".[6] Studies of Chinese ritual practice outline a complex hierarchy of state ritual, ancestor worship, and public festivals dominated by men, and another set of activities like the worship of household deities, veneration of female temple deities, and annual celebrations such as the Moon or Double Seventh Festival, where women predominate.[7]

An important subsection of Chinese ritual practice is exorcism, particularly a type of ritual play known by the general term of *nuoxi.* Village *nuoxi* have been much studied in recent decades in the major ritual study project under the general leadership of Taiwanese scholar Wang Qiugui.[8] From the numerous studies published in this project we have learnt much about the performance of *nuoxi.* Until the mid-twentieth century, *nuoxi* were performed by village men, who often inherited a particular role from their father. Scripts for these roles were passed down in manuscript form over the generations and today form the primary basis for scholarly enquiry. As I have outlined in an earlier study, these plays of exorcism were held at New Year and during the harvest festival. Their main function was to expel the demons of pestilence and ensure a fine harvest and general prosperity.[9] This was done by using the yang forces of the male performers to expel the noxious yin forces of pestilence and misfortune.[10] As I noted in my earlier study, "All performers of *nuo* plays must be male. Men play all female roles, including that of [woman] Meng Jiangnü. Women are not allowed to enter back stage, nor to touch the masks or box of props. If this taboo is infringed then the gods will be affronted".[11]

Until recent years, these sorts of popular or vernacular practices, practiced by mainly illiterate populations, have attracted less scholarly attention than the canonical rites based on elite culture.[12] The role of Chinese women, particularly that of women's laments, in popular exorcistic practice is little recognised.[13] Here I shall seek to make the case that the male performance of *nuoxi,* which protected the village from supernatural menace at critical times in the agricultural season, finds its counterpart in the bridal laments of the daughter-bride, which protected her natal family and that of her future husband from the dangers attendant on wedding 'pollution'.

In this chapter I shall discuss several types of evidence for the ritual power of bridal Chinese laments. The first body of evidence comes from popular notions about wedding pollution and the numerous exorcistic practices that are interwoven throughout popular wedding practices. The second set of evidence comes from legends about the origin of bridal laments drawn from many regions of China. These typically depict the origin of lamentation as an act of female agency carried out by woman when threatened at the time of marriage. In this interpretation, lamenting becomes a form of verbal sorcery performed by brides to ward off disaster. These emic understandings found in legends are confirmed by what

the women say themselves in many regional traditions about why they lament. Finally, I shall discuss the other type of lament where women were agents of ritual power, funeral laments. This discussion begins with definitions of ritual in Chinese canonical marriage practice and contemporary Western notions of ritual. The former did not admit the bridal lament as part of recognized ritual practice, but rather scorned it as the undisciplined and 'inauthentic' outpourings of unlettered women. Western notions of ritual, on the other hand, are much more accommodating to the notion that the Chinese lament had ritual attributes.

Chinese Canonical Marriage Rites

In studies of Chinese culture, debates about Chinese ritual often focus on the potential conflict between textual or canonical ritual *(li),* as set down in the Confucian canon of antiquity and interpreted by later authors of ritual handbooks, and actual practice or custom *(su).* Marriage ritual was an important site for debates about the relationship between *li* and *su* and encoded an implicit gender hierarchy.[14] According to Angela Zito, the goal of canonical ritual was to confine women "physically into demarcated, gendered, walled spaces" on the assumption that "women would only enact the scripts that men prepared".[15] Patricia B. Ebrey, in her discussion of instructional texts on ritual in the imperial era, comments, "All of the rites described in Confucian liturgies show ways male and female are parallel and yet male is superior to female".[16]

The extent to which canonical ritual for marriage accommodated popular practice has been subject to debate. Allen Chun, for example, who has studied ritual handbooks of the late imperial era, argues that *li* and *su* were not in any case "conceptually distinct". He further notes the "peaceful co-existence" between "orthopraxy" and social custom and practice.[17] Christian De Pee, on the other hand, believes that popular marriage customs "brought sexual bodies to the fore, emphasizing the liminal status of the bride (and the groom)" which literati, in their ritual writings, sought to eliminate.[18] In any case, bridal laments, with their unbridled expression of grievance and protest, fell outside the canonical tradition. Histrionic weeping and wailing, as distinct from subdued and customary expressions of sorrow, were considered inauspicious and out of keeping with the required compliance of the bride.[19] No canonical ritual text refers to a bride engaging in an elaborate vocal and sung wailed performance as part of the wedding ceremony and, as discussed in Chapter 5, men of letters loved to mock the lack of 'authenticity' of the lamenting village bride. Bridal laments, then, are a part of *su* or popular practice that did not so much coexist peacefully with canonical practice as deviate from and challenge it.

Western Notions of Ritual Practice

From the perspective of Western understandings of ritual practice, the Chinese bridal lament could be defined as part of ritual culture with regard to its formal performance attributes, aesthetic quality, serious intent, symbolic meaning, and supernatural efficacy. I shall discuss each of these as they relate to Chinese laments. At the most basic level, ritual refers to the carrying out of symbolically patterned activities not invented by the participants. This definition of Roy A. Rappaport's offers a minimalist understanding of ritual as "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not encoded by the performers".[20] This sort of definition accounts for the observable activity of the lamenter but does not tell us what impels her to make the effort to master the inherited repertoire and what she is trying to achieve in so doing.

Another perspective focuses on the aesthetic and evocative quality of the ritual performance. Richard Bauman defines ritual performance as "an aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication, framed in a special way and put on display for an audience".[21] The language of ritual is formal and stereotypical, a 'restricted' linguistic code, which by its very conventionality commands acquiescence to the event that is taking place.[22] This is true for laments, which encode the specific formulae relating to the kinship system, marriage customs, landscape and material culture of the region, as we have discussed in detail in the case of the Nanhui laments. There is a high degree of formulicity in laments, evident when one is able to see a 'full' lament cycle, as in the case of the cycle of Pan Cailian, available in partial translation here. Many of these formulae are found in the laments of other individuals in the Nanhui and bordering regions.[23] The Yuenlong laments of the Pearl River delta relied in similar fashion on poetic formulae derived, presumably, from the literati ballads from their home region. The Tujia laments draw their formulae from the songs and sayings of the Tujia community.

The effort to master the complex repertoire, and the exhibition of 'competence' through aesthetic display, both rely on the existence of a transmitted tradition or 'script' that gives shape to and constrains the scope of the ritual performance.[24] The script or transmitted template of the ritual tradition has a serious intent. It could, for example, relate to a model of the social order, of "what ought to be", or reflect the social relations of its community.[25] Chinese bridal laments, in common with many other ritual types, have been interpreted as a ritual of liminality, of transition from one stage in the life cycle to another, in this case the transformation of a daughter into a wife.[26]

The lament as part of a complex rite of passage for the pubescent girl is fundamental to all bridal lament traditions in China. It is also part of broader cycles

of separation and reunion universally prevalent in Chinese culture, as articulated in the study of this subject by Charles Stafford. Stafford demonstrates that in spite of the dominance of males in public appearances, most of the work of nurturing family relationships, including relations between the wife's natal home and the husband's home, falls to women. He notes that women were the "key agents" in the management of events involving separation and reunion in kinship relationships.[27] Lament performance is an interesting example, where Nanhui women play a more visible role than usual in building up relatedness. Through her lament the bride on the one hand exhibits her bonds of filiality with her natal home by an eloquent expression of sorrow, and on the other hand takes care to build up strong relations with her older brother and his wife that she hopes will stand her in good stead after her marriage.

In common with ritual practice generally, the lament performance needs to effect an emotional transformation in both the lamenter and the audience.[28] Suffering by ordeal was part of wailing performance from earliest times and it retained this quality in the bridal lament. The bride weeps and laments for several days until her voice is hoarse and all around her cry in sympathy. She fasts on the final day so that no impurity will leave her body until she arrives at the home of the groom (see discussion in Chapter 4). As in ancient *ku* performances, physical deprivation is crucial to the act of *kujia,* which relies on a demonstration of the bodily suffering of the 'victim'.[29] It is the sheer discipline of the suffering bride, the verbal sorcery of the lament repertoire, and the tears of the performer and audience that will surely deceive the demons of misfortune, who seek to destroy human happiness. As we have seen, the bride sought by the power of her wailed lament to capture the attention of her audience, gain their sympathy, project a sense of communal suffering, and evoke feelings of loss and death-like separation that sought to penetrate to the meaning of patrilocal marriage. In the case of the Nanhui lament, generations of women adapted the repertoire in order to harness the class animosities of the region, to project an identity for "the people of the sands", and in this way to draw on the sympathies of her audience. The lament was never just an expression of the sorrow of one individual but drew strength from its derivation in the collective generational transmission of a tradition believed to confer quasi-magical attributes on the performer and to benefit her receiving community.

The element of social compulsion in lament performances, the fact that in certain village settings brides were expected or required to lament at marriage, can lead to accusations of lack of authenticity and, ultimately, a lack of meaning. In fact, this was exactly why male literati in imperial times and modernist authors in the first half of the twentieth century derided female lamenters. The notion that ritual is either an "insincere public performance" or an "empty convention" is deemed "inadequate" by Eric W. Rothenbuhler, who notes the transformative effect of rituals when correctly carried out.[30] He goes so far as to say that "symbolic

effectivity is real effectivity". For example: "The performance of courteousness is courteousness. The symbols of power are part of the exercise of power . . .".[31] Similarly, Tom Lutz, in his study of tearful emotion across cultures, observes that those who disdain wept 'performances' as inauthentic "have often failed to take account of the ways in which ritual can produce, rather than simply be a forum for, emotional reactions".[32] In other words, the enactment of sorrow and grievance, if done persuasively, can bring about the desired emotional state together with a matching physical response—in this case, sobs and tears. In any case, participants do not simply transmit and comply with a particular tradition. The flexible adaptation we have seen in the case of the Chinese lamenters indicates, in the words of Bell, that performers can "reinterpret value laden symbols as they communicate them".[33]

The Chinese lamenter relied on the implicit understanding of the community that her performance, if competent and convincing, would work its particular magic. Nonetheless, ritual actions do not rely on "explicit interpretation" or "statements of belief" for their emotional attraction, and the message often remains contradictory or ambiguous.[34] An example of this would be the tension between the goal of hypergamous marriage enunciated in the imagery of the wealthy *pojia* as opposed to the impoverished *niangjia* in the Nanhui lament. The bride's sympathies apparently lie with the latter, but in the act of marriage she is enacting the aspiration of marrying into the former. The act of lamenting allows her to dramatize and render visible the ambiguity of her position.

Ritual does more than simply reflect society or mouth a 'message'. Ritual practice works on the principle that "appropriately patterned behavior constitutes symbols that are effective beyond the behavior itself". Further, participants accept that their patterned behaviour "is symbolically meaningful and effective".[35] In line with this definition, the observed patterned behaviour needs to relate to some other order, such as a moral or cosmic system or sacred presence, to be termed 'ritual'.[36] In the case of the Chinese bridal lament, it relates to the fear of pollution potentially carried by the bride as she departs her natal home for the home of the groom.

Wedding 'Pollution' and Chinese Marriage

The sands communities of Nanhui, in common with the majority of the Chinese people in pre-modern times, believed in a spirit world populated by two kinds of beings: favourable spirits who were willing to help the living and malevolent spirits who set out to wreak havoc and disaster. These spirits controlled the affairs of mankind: life, death, harvests, sickness, poverty, and wealth. A central characteristic of Chinese forms of exorcism *(bixie)* was the attempt to propitiate the

malevolent spirits through sacrifice or suffering in order to avoid a major disaster in future, in line with the popular notion that one should "lose some wealth to ward off disaster" *(po cai dang zai)*.[37] Another tactic was to set up an opposite force strong enough to overturn the forces of evil. Marriage was regarded as a happy event, exactly the time when malevolent spirits seek to do mischief. For this reason, the marriage process was a dangerous one, requiring those involved to observe certain customs and taboos.[38]

The actual day of departure for the bride was decided by the fortune-teller as propitious. Widows and pregnant women were not allowed to attend the bridal send-off; the former because they reminded the gathering of death, and the latter because the bride was meant to be virginal and their very presence was redolent of sexual practices. Women of good local standing were chosen as the ritual specialists to attend to the bride. The red veil the bride wore as she left her natal home symbolized fire (a yang force) and could help ward off the yin forces of the spirit world. She would often take with her lucky objects such as a copper mirror to ward off evil. In Nanhui, as in many parts of China, the bride was not supposed to touch the ground as she left in case the dust on her feet dragged away good fortune from her natal home. This is why the older brother would carry her to the sedan chair while the bride continued to lament.

The journey to the groom's home was also seen to be fraught with danger. Any mishap along the way would augur badly for the future of the marriage itself.[39] A route different from the way the groom had come would be chosen to fool evil spirits. Often this route would be long and circuitous. In the Nanhui lament, the bride described this lengthy journey as the bridal boat wended its way along the bends of waterways, exhibiting for all to see the dowry that manifested her value to her natal family. She continued lamenting until the moment when the groom's home came into view. Any further lamenting would bring ill luck; from now on she remained silent (see the stage translated here as "The House"). At the journey's end, fireworks announced the arrival of the bride and expelled the "evil air" *(shaqi)* carried by the bride. In her lament, the bride anticipated the terrifying sound of the fireworks as she alighted from the sedan. Once at the groom's house, she would take part with the groom in the ceremony known as "bowing to Heaven and Earth". Children and those in mourning were not allowed to attend to ensure that there was no crying or sadness to spoil the auspicious event. After the wedding banquet the bride would be subjected to the popular custom of "uproar in the bridal chamber" *(nao dongfang)*, a lengthy period of ribald and riotous behaviour. This, too, was understood as a way of driving out the demons of misfortune. For three days after marriage, the bride would not be required to go to the kitchen to work or light the fire. It was important to wait until her harmful *shaqi* had dissipated.

Legends about the Origin of Bridal Laments

Chinese legends about the origin of *kujia* also refer to its exorcistic power and reflect emic interpretations of the ritual function of the lament. One example is the story of Zhou Gong and Peach Blossom Maid (Taohuanü) from the coastal province of Zhejiang, south of Nanhui. The Peach Blossom Maid is threatened by the evil fortune-teller Zhou Gong, who chooses an inauspicious day for her marriage. To counteract this misfortune, Peach Blossom Maid tells her mother to weep as if she were dead as she departs on marriage. She engages in the rituals of aversion mentioned above (the red veil, being carried to the sedan, choosing 'fortunate woman' to assist her). In this way she manages to fool the forces of evil and avoid disaster.[40] In another version of the same story from the northern province of Jilin, Zhou Gong is not a fortune-teller but an evil ogre who demands a beautiful maiden from the village to eat. Peach Blossom Maid takes him on with her martial and magical arts but decides in the end that the only way to control him is to marry him. The ogre chooses an unlucky day for the marriage, and Peach Blossom laments copiously as she departs in order that her tears will ward off his evil magic. The marriage is completed without mishap and the ogre duly submits.

Other stories, also from Zhejiang, tell of a daughter who is abused by her stepmother. The latter sets a "weeping curse" *(kuzhou)* on the daughter when she departed on marriage. The stepdaughter counters with some verbal cunning of her own. She declares that the weeping curse in fact brought her prosperity because, she explains, "the more you weep the more you prosper" *(yue ku yue fa)*. This story is said to 'explain' why brides weep three days before departure.[41]

Emic Understandings of Bridal Laments

Women lamenters have a similar interpretation of why the bride must lament. In the region of Ningbo, on the coast south of Nanhui, the local understanding of the bride's lamentation is that she must suppress the evil forces *(ya xiongsha)*.[42] Similarly, the Tujia people of the upper Yangzi claim that "if you don't weep and wail you won't get rich" *(bu ku bu fa)*.[43] Village communities in Jiangyong, Hunan, believe that bridal laments are necessary to expel the evil *qi* brought by the groom's party.[44] The bridal laments of Yuenlong in the Pearl River delta are held to bring blessings to the family and to expel noxious influences.[45] Eugene Anderson observed that the lament songs of girls belonging to the boat people of Castle Peak and Tai O, Lantau Island, Hong Kong, in the mid-1960s were considered "a form of magic, with some actual effect in producing a happy, son-blessed,

prosperous marriage".[46] In the 1990s Nanhui women spoke of lamenting in order to "get rid of noxious forces" *(kudiao huiqi)*. Until recent years, Chinese-language scholarship has tended to assign a proto-feminist meaning to bridal laments and ignore their 'superstitious' exorcistic intent. However, a recent survey by Pan Dan of bridal laments across the whole of China does point out the ritual purpose of Chinese bridal laments in the context of the exorcistic practices attendant on the marriage ceremony: "The notion that bridal laments could exorcise evil spirits is related to ancient primitive religious ideas of exorcism. Wedding ceremonies were subject to the harrying of evil ghouls. In line with shamanistic practices one must ward this off with an opposite force".[47]

So, according to many indigenous understandings across China, the bridal lament was a performance ritual with supernatural efficacy.[48] Weeping and chanting a sanctioned repertoire of grief, sorrow, and misfortune, if performed with conviction, could deceive the demons of misfortune, who are jealous of human happiness. The main principle at work here is that of a type of sorcery by the hyperbolic enactment of sorrow and grief. The intention was to counteract baneful influences by enacting the opposite of the longed-for outcome. This is the ancient principle of *kezhi,* or countering one force with its opposite, in this case, if you long for happiness you bring it about by a dramatic expression of sorrow.[49] An effective lamenter could play a key ritual role in warding off the forces of harm and dissolution and in this way protect their families and communities.

Funeral Laments

> When you do something, make sure you do it well,
> When you 'eat tofu skin' [go to a funeral] make sure you wail.[50]

In the course of her lifetime, the Chinese woman would learn to master both bridal and funeral laments. The two types of laments created homologies between the two types of transition, marriage and death.[51] In both forms one can see strong examples of women's ritual agency. In the pre-modern era, women played important ritual roles in mortuary customs, particularly the performance of 'unclean' tasks such as laying out and washing the body. In addition, they predominated in the performance of funeral laments, which assisted the soul to find its earthly home after death.[52] In Nanhui three types of songs were performed in the funeral lament. The first type was known as "impromptu lament" *(sanku)*. These were closest to the bridal laments. *Sanku* had a loose structure and included many refrains such as "Mother, you are dead, truly you are wronged" or "Mother, you've died, it should not be". The *sanku,* like the bridal lament, was directly addressed to the deceased and varied in content with the kin relationship. Another type was

known as "the set piece" *(taotou)*. These were memorized and known by names such as "Repaying Mother's Kindness", "Twelve Seeking Their Mother". The latter uses imagery of animals seeking their mother. "The Ten Sufferings" was a set piece that could be used for any deceased and could be flexibly employed to elaborate one's own or another's suffering. "The Twelve Remedies" could be used in cases of death by illness.

Songs sung at particular stages of the funeral ceremony are known as *jing* (sutra). These are associated with rituals of settling the spirit of the dead or rites of purification. Once someone has died, the daughter or daughter-in-law sings "The Final Breath Sutra" *(duanqi jing)*. As clean clothes are placed on the deceased, one sings "The Changing of Clothes" *(huanyi jing)*, and so on. The sutra songs are strongly ritually efficacious. The Changing Clothes ritual, for example, should be carried out at a moment of emotional climax in order to bring on prosperity and good fortune. When the body is placed in the coffin it should be the daughter, not the daughter-in-law, who laments the "Immortal Coffin Sutra". In most cases, the coffin leaves the home on the third day and the funeral itself is held on the third day after death. At dawn on the third day, the senior daughter-in-law would lament "Open up the Gates [of Hell]", pass around the main room three times, and call on the dead to eat ritual dumplings. In the early morning, the daughter would lament "Departure of the Coffin Sutra" *(chu cai jing)*. In the afternoon, articles the deceased requires in the afterlife are prepared. The final step is to lament using the "Spirit Tablet Sutra" *(lingtai jing)*. The sutra-type songs describe the rigors the deceased must now undergo in the afterlife, the confrontation with devils and ghouls and Yanwang, Lord of the Underworld.

In the daughter's address to her deceased mother, one finds much of the same formulaic repertoire of the bridal lament recurring, particularly the images focusing on the lamenter's own hardships and sense of grievance over her destiny as a woman:

> Dear Mother,
> You've raised me since I was small, what use am I?
> You've wasted your efforts—raised me in vain.
> If you raise my brothers, they can be useful.
> But you raise this young daughter to eat someone else's rice . . .
> You raised my brothers, this is useful,
> The *wurong* tree blossoms, its tips reach high to the heavens,
> But raising this daughter is like the *baiguo* tree, which, when it blooms, droops downwards . . .

The daughter also expresses her distress that it is the daughter-in-law who is present at the ceremony as mourner, not herself:

It is the uncaring daughter-in-law who accompanies you to the hall of mourning,
While your loving daughter laments by the side of the road.[53]

Her perceived lack of filiality contrasts with the dedicated care her mother gave her as an infant. Then the daughter promises to repay her mother by mourning in the seven-day cyclical pattern dictated by common custom and Buddhist ritual:

Mother,
On the seventh day of the seventh month I will repay my debt to you . . .
You struck ice to wash my nappies, such hard toil!
My own mother, your ten fingers frozen, each one in pain,
Mother,
On the seventh day of the seventh month I will repay my debt to you,
Mother, you carried me crossways for three years,
You carried me downways for three years to help me grow,
You endured this to care for me for three whole years.
Dear Mother,
The flowers bud and wither, year after year,
But when will I see my mother return? [54]

Her lament contains a strong autobiographical component. She recalls the sufferings of the early years of her marriage and complains once more about the way the family devotes their resources to the boy but stint on the girl:

When I went to that house as daughter-in-law,
I looked forward to good food and nice clothes.
But when I went to that house as bride,
On the one hand there were insults,
On the other, the mother-in-law was fierce.
I've gained nothing from being a daughter-in-law,
Just eaten bitterness as deep as the ocean.[55]

The generic parallels between the bridal and the funeral lament implied the intrinsic commensurability of the two rites of transition: marriage and death. Both types of lament were primarily performed by women in Nanhui, and the repertoire in each case was specific to the kin relationship and ceremonial context in which it was performed. To an extent, bridal and funeral laments shared a similar verbal repertoire of protest and sorrow.[56] Both dwelt on the life situation of the performer and her real or imagined grievances, and both were performed at key points in the staging of the wedding or funeral ceremony. Both lament forms

sought to create an emotional pitch in the participants and to achieve a ritual efficacy that would bring good fortune to the community.

* * *

Chinese bridal laments served a serious ritual purpose as well as providing entertainment and drama to the wedding spectacle. Nonetheless, Chinese elites derided them as "inauthentic" and failed to understand their ritual purpose. The contrasting practices of elite and subaltern were the consequence of a different set of understandings about marriage and death. Orthopraxy, the notion that common practices and symbols held together a people of diverse beliefs and interpretations, was challenged in this case because not only was there a bifurcation with regard to practice but also with regard to beliefs and ideas. The folk understanding of the marriage process, for example, was that it was fraught with danger and required complex taboos and exorcistic practices. This understanding was quite distinct from the ideological underpinning of the canonical rites as recorded in texts such as the *Book of Rites*. The ritual events listed in the latter are much the same as in popular practice: the betrothal through a go-between, divination, the groom's party coming to take the bride, the rites before the ancestral shrine in the groom's house, the wedding banquet and rituals of obeisance to the parents-in-law, and so on. However, the rationale is different. In the *Book of Rites* these activities were intended to demonstrate the Confucian social hierarchy and effect a moral transformation in the participants.[57] Canonical *li* was concerned with "the proper ordering of all human relationships" so that the state would be governed in line with the cosmic order.[58] It was of fundamental importance that the canonical marriage ceremony underline the compliance of the bride with her new role as daughter-in-law incorporated into the husband's patriline.

At the popular level, however, the village community observed a bride who lamented, wept, cursed, and even hurled words of abuse over a period of days before her final departure. In her impassioned performance, the bride sought to dramatize the physical act of removal from her home and, by implication, her powerlessness to prevent the appropriation of her person by the groom.[59] For many in her natal family, especially the mother and sisters, this would be a sad occasion. For the groom's family who bore her away, and for village observers, it would be a gratifying spectacle enacting the inevitability of patrilocal marriage. This was articulated as a belief in the ritual power of the bride's wailing—the more distressed she appeared, the more she would be able to repel the forces of misfortune. The paradox of the bridal lament, and its attraction for the audience, lay in that it allowed the bride to verbally defy the process of her alienation from the home of her parents, while at the same time her bodily actions were compelled to conform to the 'ritual order' enacted in the wedding ceremony.

Afterword

> In those [ancient] times there were no aggrieved women and no men without wives.
>
> —*Mencius* I:B.5 [1]

Mencius assured King Xuan of Qi that if he could govern his state as well as the sage rulers of antiquity then there would be no dissatisfied women or unmarried men. The king who achieved this could rise to become universal ruler of the empire. In China of the twenty-first century, traditions of son preference combined with current state policies have failed to provide wives to all men who want them. Time-honoured conventions governing patrilocal marriage continue to stir up complaints amongst Chinese women, although traditional forms of female specific grievance have been transformed into the 'speaking bitterness' genres of the socialist period and the grumblings and discontents of post-socialist modernity.[2]

This study began with a detailed look at the bridal laments of Nanhui and the lament cycle of Pan Cailian, who learnt her repertoire in the 1920s. What has happened to the region and to its lamentation traditions by the end of the twentieth century? In this final reflection, I will comment on the changes wrought in the reform era (post-1978).

During the 1980s, people in the Shanghai region felt left behind by the explosion of growth taking place in the Pearl River delta, and the area to the east of the Huangpu River remained underdeveloped. This was to change from 1989, when the State Council announced the formation of a new Shanghai city across the river. This eastern region was divided into two sections: a northern area to be known as the Pudong Economic Zone and, to the south, the county of Nanhui.[3] During the 1990s Nanhui underwent major development to support the Pudong Economic Zone, which aspires to be the most advanced region in China, superseding Hong Kong.[4] The whole region to the east of the Huangpu River,

once regarded as "backward" and undeveloped, is now linked to the metropolis by major bridges. In 1994 the journey from Shanghai to Shuyuan in southern coastal Nanhui involved a ferry trip from Shanghai, travel by hired car along unmade dirt roads, and a walk along the muddy banks of a water channel to the coastal villages. A few years later, highways extended to the southern reaches of Nanhui, and China's most modern airport (the Shanghai International Airport) was built on its northern boundary. The reed-filled southern coast of Luchaogang (aptly named "Reedy Tide Harbour") has been dredged of its reeds and is poised to become a modern harbour for container ships servicing the new industries of the Pudong region. The new Nanhui has a population of 691,000 people and comprises twenty-five small towns together with the Kangqiao industrial centre. In the twenty-first century Nanhui has become a district *(qu)* of Shanghai and serves as the base for major multinational companies.[5] The old world reflected in the lament traditions of the area, and preserved until the late twentieth century, is on the verge of disappearing entirely.

In the period of economic reform and the "one-child policy", there have been significant changes in marriage practices in the delta region, including Nanhui. As before, local economics drives the specifics of the marriage 'market'. Now that families commonly have one child, the parents cannot afford to lose the labour and care of their only child and are thus unwilling to accept the incorporation of their son or daughter into another family. For this reason, it has become less common for married couples to live with the groom's family. In a survey carried out in 2000, the number of nuclear families living separately in selected regions of Nanhui was as high as 67.57 percent, although they often still lived near to the groom's parents and saw them very regularly.[6] Empowered by an unequal sex ratio and booming consumption patterns, brides in coastal provinces demand separate marital mansions as the price of marriage. As a result, housing construction has boomed in Nanhui and the delta region generally.[7]

A new practice that has emerged with the marriage of two single children is to have the groom work the property of both his parents and those of his bride *(liang bian zhu)*. At the time of betrothal, a bride-price and dowry are not exchanged. Instead both families prepare a new house and furniture for the young couple. After marriage, the couple spends time in both families and accepts responsibility of looking after both sets of parents. Ultimately they will inherit from both families.[8]

Patterns of patrilocal marriage that have endured for millennia are being transformed and with them a change in attitude towards the relative value of boys and girls. Parents over forty years of age surveyed in Luchao Harbour, just south of Shuyuan, expressed the view that it was better to have girls rather than boys because "girls are more filial and obedient *(xiaoshun)* than boys; they can manage household affairs and look after the elderly".[9] The reason for this change of

heart lies in the greater educational and career opportunities for young women in the Nanhui area and consequent changes in the capabilities of daughters to act in a filial way towards their own parents after marriage. Many women have found work in the light industries that have sprung up in recent years. With increased opportunity for female employment, it is becoming customary for Nanhui brides to care for their parents and parents-in-law in rotation.[10] The new economic role opening up for daughters in single-child families allows young women to fulfil an old value—filial piety towards the parents of their birth as well as care of the parents of their spouse. It appears that in twenty-first century Nanhui, the paradigms of the past still continue to influence the present, as women aspire to male models of filiality—the "bamboo rice sieve" is converting into a "copper spoon".

Appendix 1

Nanhui Lament Transcription

Lament excerpt analysed in Chapter 4. From the beginning of "Filling the Box". The breaks in the text represent melodic and poetic units in the sung lament. Rhymed Chinese words are underlined.

Mother to daughter
囡啦

Daughter,
1 You must always [be like] the newly rising sun, [like the] sky born anew,
儂總要　　重生日頭，寄生天

Once you　　change your household, you must learn to follow their ways.
儂　　轉換門風，學好伊，

You must not　　compare [this] with living at your mother's home;
儂勿　　比得登勒，我娘屋[裏]

[When you] live in your mother's home, [you can] play idly with cotton skeins,
登勒我娘屋裏廂仔，棉花條子，丟丟玩，

5 [You can] roam from the western room to the eastern room,
東宅跑到　　西宅停

Living with your mother, [you] do not have to steam three measures of rice,
登勒我娘屋裏廂，　　三升米飯　　燒勿熟

Nor do you have to cook salty and bland foods.
鹹淡小菜　　燒勿來，

[But when] you go to the home of that name, they are a family of property,
儂到格拉　　姓啥門中[末] 有啦格

Their family heads are well known in the world outside.
格拉仔　　外場大人　　有名氣

10 And within their family their seniors cherish the younger ones.
裏場大人　　愛大細

Appendix 2

Translation: The Bridal Laments of Pan Cailian of Shuyuan, Nanhui

This partial translation of the lament cycle of Pan Cailian is based on the transcription in Ren Jiahe, *Hunsang yishi ge* (Shanghai: Zhongguo minjian wenyi chubanshe, 1989). The script is transposed in the local Wu topolect and employs expressions and character usages not found in Standard Chinese (for a sample, see the excerpt given in Appendix 1). The text has not been revised by 'literary' editors and includes repetitions and ambiguities that are usually deleted in transcripts made of Chinese oral traditions.

The laments are difficult to understand and translate because they rely on local imagery whose referents are understood by native speakers of the region but not necessarily by outsiders. In my translation and interpretation I have relied heavily on explanations given in Mandarin by Chen Qinjian, East China Normal University, Shanghai. I have also consulted dictionaries on the Shanghai and Wu topolect, especially Thomas Creamer's *A Chinese-English Dictionary of the Wu Dialect* (1991), the *Shanghai fangyan cidian* (1997), and the *Wu fangyan cidian* (1995). According to Chen, the transcript contains many 'errors' (localized usages) in transcribing the Shuyuan patois into Chinese characters. For this reason, some of the interpretations below remain tentative, even for native speakers of the Pudong region.

In my English version, I have sought to produce an accurate rendition of the text that also captures something of its rhythms and earthy pungency. I have relied as far as possible on the pre-Latinate resources of the English language in this translation, and avoided 'literary' forms of expression. The women who transmit this repertoire are similarly removed from the classical expressions and allusions of Chinese literate culture. Pan Cailian was regarded as a particularly good singer of *kujia,* and this lament reflects her own inventions as well as the tradition she inherited. To give the reader a glimpse of the 'intertextuality' within the Nanhui lament, I have compared transcriptions of other Shanghai County laments with those of Pan and noted any parallels in endnotes.

Filling the Box (Kai xiang) [1]

[*Mother to daughter:*]

Daughter,
You must always be like the newly rising sun, like the sky born anew.
Once you change your household, you must learn how to follow their ways.

You must not compare this with living at your mother's home;
When you live in your mother's home, you can play idly with cotton skeins,
You can scamper from the western room to the eastern room.
Living with your mother, you do not have to steam three measures of rice,
Nor do you have to cook salty and bland foods.
But when you go to the home of that name, they are a family of property,
Their family heads are well known in the world outside,
And within their family the seniors cherish the younger ones.

Daughter,

When you change your household, you must learn from them.
Living in your mother's home, we are so poor we bathe in oil from the lamp.[2]
When we use wheat stalks to tell our fortune, it's the devils who do the counting.[3]
But when you live with the family of that name, now they are a family of property.
Living at your mother's home, the roof is low and the eaves bent down,
The 'wall-foot'[4] is as narrow as a thread,
The eaves are only two foot two from the ground.
The stone pavers caked in mud [outside our house] is where we raise ducks,
No sooner do you get the left foot out, then the right foot sinks in.[5]

Daughter,

You have been given to a family of property.
Their newly built home is bustling and grand,
The newly cut brick wall is like the walls of Nanhui town,[6]
Their rafters are lacquered black, glistening with oil,
In their house the eaves are deep and the 'wall-foot' broad,
When they rinse and boil rice they don't get their feet wet.[7]
They have a low wall by the water's edge, and a stone bridge [curved] like a horse's saddle,
On the bridge, a railing secures each step they take.

[*The daughter sings:*]

Mother,

From birth I have borne my father's name,
As fixed and certain as the nail knocked into the weighing scales,[8]
I am just like the shellfish bought during the "mouldy season" and steeped in brine,[9]
Or like wet cigarette butts, stuff to be thrown away.[10]

Mother,

When I live with you, you cook our rice and gruel with care,
When you make soups and boil water, you take great pains,
Now I go to that home as wife of their son, I cannot match your skills in any way.
If I want a new blue cloth shirt, my mother will spin it for me,
If I want a black cloth skirt, my mother will get it for me,
I do not labour for the rice I eat and the clothes I wear,
I eat rice made by others and pay no heed at all.

Dear Mother,
You've raised me tenderly but you have done me harm,
When you raise a son, you can do this until he is old.
Now I go to that home as wife of their son,
The threshold of their home is three foot three tall [a noble house].
It is easy to enter their home but hard to leave.
How can I make them curve their eyebrows at my command?
How can I make their teeth open like flower buds and lower cheeks move in welcome?
How can I make them flash their thirty-six teeth at me?
In the second and third month, when spring warmth fills the air,
I will long for my brothers, big and small, to invite me to return home.
If I want to return home on my own, it's difficult to leave.
It will be like eating "tribute rice" or "ruled by officials".[11]
When you follow the path of officialdom, there is the law of officials to control you.
From now on I go to another home as wife,
I am given to the harshest family in the world;
Stubborn as an ox, that's what they are.
In my future life I will eat my fill of bitterness and endure endless pain.
When I'm married off to them, each *mu* of their land will lose a third,
In the middle will lie small grave mounds,
On their banks and beaches weeds will tangle thickly.[12]
I am climbing high [in this marriage] only to fall the harder.
My dear mother, you have given me a solid cake that is really just a hollow steamed bun.[13]
When I go to their home as their son's wife, I cannot work to their satisfaction.
At their home the Dama [elder brother's wife] will seek a bigger dowry;
Beneath her the Ashen [younger brother's wife] will seek a larger trousseau.

Dear Mother,
When you marry me off you'll have to really sweat.
Be sure to prepare many many items [for my dowry].
When you marry me off to the family of that name, they will not be satisfied with me.
They are a family of great wealth, with bulging eyes.
When they hear about property their ears stick up like stakes.

[*The mother sings:*]

Daughter,
When you're married off, it will be to a family of property.
In their family, even though they do not eat "tribute grain" they still eat well;
Although they do not sow cotton seeds, they still wear good clothing;
Three hundred *mu* of tribute grain surrounds their home on four sides;[14]

An ox-drawn plough winds around their crop of sticky rice;[15]
Paddy fields curve around the banks of their estate.
Daughter,
We live on the lowlands but they live on high banks.
Poor people have to climb high to see lofty relatives,
[Like] grass climbing up bamboo clumps by the shore.
Daughter,
We have given you to a family of property.
They are like muskmelon tendrils climbing up bamboo groves.[16]
They have climbed up to the nobility but wear 'straw sandals' themselves.
Daughter,
When you go to the family of that name, you must change your ways and learn from them.
Living at your mother's home, we spend most of our money on rice and firewood;
We use a little money for other household needs.
If we want oil, salt, soy sauce, and vinegar we go the shops
If we want rice and firewood we have to purchase it all.[17]
Daughter,
Living at your mother's home your hair can be messy on both sides.
[But once married] your hair will reek of dew in the morning and frost at night.[18]
Your feet will tread the morning dew and the evening's frost. . . .

. . . . . .

[*The daughter sings:*]

Dear Mother,
You are marrying me off to the family of that name, you speak a lot of fine and powerful words,
But in reality when you fry a grape the ends become sharp.
You give me over to them, [like] a plate of fragrant coiled tripe,
When the red beans blossom, the buds are glistening white.[19]
The mother of that family is notorious for bullying her daughters-in-law.
From now on when you make clothing, measure out the cloth a bit larger,
Make the sleeves a little broader,
So that my father can go and pay his respects to them at New Year wearing loose and bulgy clothes.[20]
Mother,
You've raised me, this young girl, like the useless weeds that don't need water.
Although now I've grown up I still do nothing for you.
My mother, you have raised me to maturity and trained me how to behave.
Living at my mother's home we dine with thin bamboo chopsticks and 'ocean bowls',[21]
When I eat gruel and rice I can take my bowl and sit where I please.
But from now on when I go to their home as their son's wife,

They use chopsticks of mahogany and ivory, and bowls of exquisite quality.
When eating gruel and rice they dine [formally] at the table.
This young girl is neither intelligent nor competent.
In days to come my senior sisters-in-law will appraise me,
The brothers-in-law will compare my skills [with those of their women],
In days to come when I will go to their home as their son's wife,
This young daughter-in-law, how can I satisfy them?
When I live at home, if I make my mother angry,
It's like the snow and rain of the new year that falls beneath the eaves.
The ice and snow are frozen but quickly melt away.
My father's anger is like a brisk gust of wind in the sixth month, in an instant it blows away.
But in days to come when I go to become their son's wife,
If I anger my father-in-law it will be like offending the magistrate of Nanhui.
If I anger my mother-in-law it will be like offending the Wife of the City God.
I will pass my days in future as if living in prison,
Hoping that my brothers come to visit, so they will not be too strict with me.
Then their large and small sticks will stop beating me.
I hope that my brothers will invite me back home in the second and third month of spring,
And will come and visit me in autumn, during the eighth and ninth month.

Dear Mother,
You have raised a daughter who is nothing but discount goods; I can do nothing for you.

[*The mother sings:*]

Daughter,
You were reborn to your mother,[22] down to your ten fingers, a piece of my flesh.
Born from my belly fat, a lump of my flesh.
When you were reborn to your father, he smoked his pipe in silence by the stove,
Saying not a word [of complaint] when people enquired,[23]

Daughter,
When you go to the family of that name, they are a family of property.
In their home they have strict rules and many ceremonies.
In the first two weeks of the new year, there are many taboos.
They invite many senior members of the family, one after the other,
From the east and the west, grandfathers and uncles come in droves,

Daughter,
You must not behave as you do in your mother's home.
Living at your mother's home, we treat you as fresh bamboo and tender shoots,
We always make allowances for your youth.
When you go to their house you will eat their food,
It is they who will order you about.
When you take up their chopsticks, it is they who will control you.

You must not behave as at your mother's house, your own boss, doing just as you please.
Just as the winter melon grows on its own in a grassy patch,
You will have to change your behaviour and learn their ways.[24]
Daughter,
Your mother has nothing [good] to give you.
I have not given you a "pure-water" white-patterned blue-lined jacket
Nor a pair of matching red and green coverlets,[25]
Nor can I give you a bean-flower-patterned coverlet.
But the family of that name have wealth throughout the Huangpu region.
Daughter,
For my part, I go around barefoot.[26]
But when you live at their house, your parents-in-law have property.
Their seniors speak with pointed tongues in the world outside,
Their fingers are pointed, they [know how to] write,
Their family elders appear in society.[27]
You can't compare this with living at your mother's home.
. . . . . .

[*The mother sings:*]

Daughter,
You were reborn to a poor father and a poor mother—you are poor from birth.
A girl from a wealthy family has a rich dowry,
But a girl from a poor family is just put up for sale!
Your mother has not been very clever,
We accepted all the gifts they brought to us.
The family of that name has property,
The brother who comes to take the bride [the groom] is a man of style,
But our small daughter is as worthless as a piece of wood, of what value is she?
Daughter,
The family of that name has property,
Our young daughter sought in marriage has coarse skin and big feet.
She is short and stunted, not like a proper person at all.
But when their bridal sedan departs, the very earth will move,
Their relatives and dependants will form a vast crowd,
They will draw back the curtain to see the bride—
Our small daughter with her coarse skin and big feet,
Valueless as a piece of wood, not like a proper person at all.
Daughter,
The family of that name has property,
They slaughter chickens and sheep, a family of means.
In their banquets, wine flows for three days, they put on a huge show,
For six days wine flows, a great display.

The cooks in their kitchen are highly skilled,
They make sixteen rare dishes and four plates of sugared fruit.
Daughter,
You will be married into a family of means,
The family of that name lives in a huge residence.
I spoke to the matchmaker, who told me of their wealth.
I told her to accept no [betrothal] gifts from the Zhong, the Yan, or the Sheng,
And to take little from the Xi family of Shaolou.[28]
I told her to accept nothing from the Zhong, the Yan, and the Sheng,
And not to talk of a match with the Xi family of Shaolou.
[How could we] give our small daughter to these fine families?
How could our lowly family serve as a big foundation stone—
It would be like a small ox trying to pull a huge carriage!
Daughter,
You are going to the family of that name, people of property.
Their residence has ten wings and nine courtyards,[29]
Our small daughter, how can you be worthy of this?
. . . . . .
Dear Mother,
But now I go to that home to be their son's wife,
When the cock crows I will be forced to rise.[30]
When the cock crows a second time, I will comb, get dressed, and go through the bedroom door.
When the cock crows a third time I will take up the four-strand-handle rice measure and bamboo sieve[31] and go to see my mother-in-law.
When I go to greet my mother-in-law, she'll pretend to be deaf.
When I greet my father-in-law, he'll pretend to be blind.
When I greet my aunts and uncles, they'll be like stinging burrs.
If I cook too much, this shows I am disorganised,
If I cook too little, this just shows my humble origins.
The Dama in their house makes rice as fragrant as sticky rice,
The gruel she cooks tastes like sweet dates,
Her bean curd tastes like salted meat,
How can this small daughter be her match?
. . . . . .
Daughter,
When you live with the family of that name you must change your ways and learn from them,
You must devote yourself to respecting the seniors,
Fix your resolve to serve your parents-in-law.
Daughter,
You [and your husband] must be like a pair of mandarin ducks, like two dough sticks *(youtiao)* stuck together,

Like a pair of sweet potatoes stuck to the one root.
You must not be bad-tempered or show your anger.
You must not have a temper like dry kindling or a fiery tongue.
Don't be like those who seek to put plaster on the central beam
Or pour cold water on the backs of ducks.[32]
. . . . . .

[*The daughter sings:*]

Dear Mother,
When I was a young child, how you treasured and valued me,
Just like Henan dates mixed with white sugar.
One piece of sugar, one piece of rice cake,
Once in the mouth, you don't want it to melt too soon.
If you hold it in your hands, you are afraid it will crumble,
My dear mother, how you treasured me and valued me!
[In those days] you did not treat boys and girls differently,
But today as I stand on the plank [by the bed] you treat me differently from the boys—how unjust![33]
Dear Mother,
Many thanks to you, my thanks to you.
You have good reason to value my older brother, like the copper ladle in the soup pot.
If you use a rice sieve to bear water, it all flows away.
But if you use a wooden bucket to draw water, then the vats will be full.
You have raised this small daughter but have nothing to show for it.
You have treasured and cherished me in vain.
Now I go to that family to be their son's wife,
From now on I will suffer endlessly and endure hardship without end.
. . . . . .
Dear Mother,
In their midst I will be just a young girl, good for nothing.
A no-good girl, they will not be happy with me.
My mother-in-law will think I'm useless.
When I am married off to that family, the Dama will cast sneering eyes at me,
And beneath her, the Ashen aunt will look askance at me,
They will sneer at me to 'instruct' me,
They will look askance at me to 'discipline' me.
Mother,
But in reality they will sneer at me as inferior goods.
They will look askance at me in order to make fun of me.
I will not dare to utter the angry words in my heart,
Nor move my eyebrows up and down,
Nor spit out the foul taste from my mouth.
. . . . . .

Dear Father,
Today I kneel on both knees to thank you,
It is you who from childhood have cherished me and held me dear,
Dear Father, from childhood, you did not treat me differently from the boys.
But today [as I stand] on the plank [by my bed] you treat me differently from the boys, how unjust![34]
Dear Father,
You should simply have killed me when I was born, and that is all.
You should just have struck me three times with the shovel and twice with the hoe, and put an end to me.
But now you have raised me for over twenty years, only to send me forth as someone's wife.
Dear Father,
You raised me as your daughter, but I cannot lift a thousand *jin* like my father.
Nor can I use the shuttle of poplar [as well as] my mother.
You raised my elder brother, he can lift a thousand *jin* and replace his father,
You sought for him a wife who can weave and take the place of my mother.
Father,
You have raised me, this small daughter, and fed me,
Dear Father,
When I was still a small child someone came to take my birth dates *(ba zi)*.
If you had cherished me, dear Father, you would not have given my birth dates at all.
Dear Father, you should not have sent my birth dates to the east and to the west,
And sent it to that family, for me to be that son's wife.
They are like yellow muskmelons, all rotten inside,
Or like radishes past spring, when they turn to mush.
You have married me off to the harshest, stubbornest family in the world!
Dear Father,
You cherish me, your small daughter, but what is the good of that?
This young daughter is [valueless like] a plank of wood,
This young daughter is just a girl of straw.
When the wind blows, it knocks me down,
When the rain falls, I melt away.
Sesame seeds from Nanjing are tiny and weak,
Gaoliang seeds from Nanjing are small.
When I, your daughter, go to that home to be their son's wife,
At their house, on top is the Dama [elder brother's wife], with her shoulders of bronze and waist of iron.
In one pannier on her shoulders she can carry three *mu* of wheat.
The first time she changes shoulders she has crossed the stone bridge,
The second time she shifts shoulders she has already entered the rear courtyard.
But I, your daughter, have shoulders of bean curd and a waist of sticky rice.
I need two panniers to carry three *qian* of straw for the lanterns.[35]

When I carry three *qian* of bean curd I wobble around.
I, your daughter, going to their house as their son's wife, I cannot work to their satisfaction.
The thorns of roses prick and make them difficult to pluck,
Flowers high on rocky crags are hard to reach by hand.
When grain is hulled you can't make string from the husks.

[*The mother sings:*]

Daughter,
When you were a child we raised you, making allowances for your weaknesses.
We cherished you and treasured you,
We raised you, not treating you differently from the boys.
So many years, so much time, we never cast you aside.
Today we have invited many relatives to marry you off.
[Standing] on the plank we help you change your clothes.
By the stove, we have set out rice to feed you.[36]
Daughter,
When you live at their house, you must seize your own slice of Heaven and your own piece of Earth,
Steer the boat and wield the pole just like your father.
You too can open the door and lift the heavy grate just like your mother.
When you live at their house you will carry out [the barrel] of filth and do the dirty work.[37]
But today a magical wind will bear our small daughter away.
We have no gold for you, nor any silver,
We have nothing to give you.
Daughter,
Your father tills the fields so that we can eat, he truly suffers.
He works from first light till the dark of night.
In this way he raised you, my small daughter.
His hands are wizened like the root of a spinach,
His feet are like an old tree root,
He toils from first light until darkness falls,
He gets up early and labours till night comes.
Daughter,
We did not call in the dressmaker to make you clothing,
Nor did we call a barrel maker to make you barrels for your trousseau,
Nor did we call in a carpenter to make furniture for your dowry,
Nor did we order for you four kitchen goods and eight boxes of household goods.
My young daughter, I ask you to forgive us.

Thanking the Father (Xie ye) [38]

In thanking her father for his gifts, the bride acknowledges the hard toil that made her dowry possible and the father's poverty, but even so, she seeks to play on his feelings to

give her "just a little more". Once again, as in "Filling the Box", the bride declares that her father should have killed her off at birth with his rake and hoe. In the next line she hurls forth striking images of self-abasement, but cleverly turns the argument on its head in the final image. This line contains four imperative negatives (*wu,* "do not") in a series of grammatically parallel statements: "You should not have raised me, I've brought nothing but trouble, nothing but ill luck—don't let me now bring ruin to someone else!" Precisely because she is so useless and ill-fated, it would be irresponsible to send her off to bring the same misfortune to another family.

My Father,
No word reached us by the second month[39] Festival of the Dead [Qingming],
At the summer solstice festival [Duanwu] still no message was sent,
At the ninth month Double Ninth Festival the matter was not raised.
At no festival time did they send word, nor did they spend days discussing the matter.
My own Father, you just agreed with a single word.
My own Father,
You just took the peach-red invitation with the border of green,
Once spoken, your word must be honoured.
My own Father,
On ordinary days I have no way to thank you,
But today I kneel on the ground to thank you deeply.
Father,
Covered in sweat, you have toiled to prepare my trousseau.
But when it is taken to that family they will despise it.
My own father, you have prepared some large candlesticks, gleaming like silver.[40]
You have given me a six-strand [handled] *tianyu* pot, as large as a *beng* pot.[41]
You have given me a large face basin and a foot basin.
You have given me a huge brass foot warmer with a *paktung*[42] handle.
It has three hundred finely-crafted 'plum-blossom' holes,
And a hand warmer with four hundred holes like peppercorns.[43]
Dear Father,
My father's home is bare, your hands are tight.
But you value me and have sought to raise me high,
Try your hardest to give me just a little more!
Their gaze is broad, their eyes bulge [with greed],
They have heard much, their ears are huge,
Only fine and rare things find favour with them.
My own Father,
You have raised me this small daughter, not dividing boys from girls,
But today, as I stand on the plank, you send me away, your own daughter—how unfair!
When I was a child you treasured me and valued me.
You treated me just the same as my older brother.
Today, even though I am of tender years, you send me away to be that man's wife.

My own Father,
Are you giving me to a household getting poorer by the day?
Or to a home with newly made wealth and hair clasps of gold?
Or to a home with shady pines along freshly made banks?
Or perhaps they are of modest means but few burdens, that would be fine.
You've sent me to the east and the west,
Perhaps you've sent me off to live by the sea wall.[44]
Before I walk one step I'll fall into a clump of reeds.
Each mouthful I sip will taste like ox piss;
I will wash my rice in muddy water where oxen have trod.
I will seek pure water from fine holes made by water crabs.
Their women, young and old, each step they take is in the surging tide.
Each mouthful they eat tastes of brackish water.
They eat food plucked fresh by the wayside,
The things they buy are mainly cheap,
Pretty patterned goods are there for the asking.
They rely on the surging tide for food.
Rice from east of the sea wall is fragrant as the osmanthus flower,
Rice from west of the sea wall smells like jujube dates.
You have sent me to the very edge of the sea wall to be someone's wife.
You should not have sent me this way and that,
I will live by the banks of the sea wall, eating nothing but rough mixed grain.
My own Father,
You've raised this young daughter, but of what use am I?
You should have killed me off long before,
With just three strokes of the spade and two of the hoe.[45]
You should not have raised me, I've brought nothing but trouble, nothing but ill luck, don't let me now bring ruin to someone else!
My own Father,
You've raised this young daughter, now you send me off with nothing to show for it.
You've raised this young daughter, I'm just like the warm water pot on the stove, if you strike me with a copper scoop like a drum, no sound comes forth.[46]
You've raised this young daughter, she can't be counted like a son.
This girl is just discounted goods.
In dealing with people I am like rice that cannot be ground with a pestle,
With my aunts and sisters, I cannot be blended.[47]
I am short and small, not a normal person at all!
You have given me to that family to be a daughter-in-law.
Their women are glamourous and pretty, with fine manners.
From this day on, when I live with their women, grind and pound as they will, I just won't mix!
My own Father,
Your jade-white long sleeves, you'll need to make them a little larger,

From now on you will have to swing your sleeves [in humility] when you bow to them at New Year.
Make your clothing bigger, the better to make yourself look small![48]
You've raised this young daughter, when I say the wrong things, people will carp.
When I make mistakes in my work, they will tease and scold.
From now on the seniors will be annoyed with me.
As in midwinter, when snow and rain freeze solid at the rear 'wall foot',[49]
Blocks of ice and frozen snow, how can it melt?
The anger of the senior men will be like that of local officials,[50]
The anger of the aunts and uncles will be like that of stinging burrs.
If you marry me to a herbalist there will be a lot of herbal medicine,
If you give me to a dye shop, there will be much coloured cloth.
If you give me to potters, there will be many pots and pitchers.
At their house there will be many aunts and uncles,
It will be hard to cope with them, to know what to cook.
My father, you should have used your own ears and eyes.[51]
In the east they didn't take me in, in the west they didn't want me.
Water heads downhill,
People seek high places.
You [hoped to] raise me up, to put me up on high,
Who could know that family would be so rude and unreasonable!
Boorish like oxen, that's what they're like!
Like cucumbers, fine on the outside but rotten inside,
Or like the radish past its season, when it turns to mush.
Three measures of rice flour, they take in a single hand,
Three cash of pepper sticks in their 'pepper hands'.[52]
If you fry a grape it turns dry and sharp.[53]
In facing them, I cannot compete with them, nor can I hurl abuse like them;
My nose moistens and my eyes fill with tears, I admit defeat.

Thanking the [Paternal] Grandfather (Xie dada) [54]

The grandfather is portrayed as doting on his granddaughter so much that he treats her like a precious Buddha. The bride calls on him now to urge her family to add to her trousseau and in that way enhance her status as a bride and the family's reputation.

In summer when the sweet potato first ripens, it is fibrous and tough,[55]
I turn now to thinking of my dear grandfather.
My grandfather [treats] this small child as if lighting incense at the feet of a gold Buddha;
My grandfather treats me like precious cash or a valuable treasure.
Meals of gruel and rice you gave as a matter of course,
But meat dumplings and sticky rice dumplings [festival food] you served me [first].[56]

Living with my grandparents, no one dares insult me,
Even my parents dare not be too strict.
Now I am to be given to that family as their son's wife,
Given to the family of that name, with their big sticks and little sticks they will beat me without end.
Grandfather,
You only have to say a few words to my father and uncles
And they will come out in support of me.
My aunts will enter my room and teach me.
Grandfather,
In front of my aunts give them this message:
You tell my aunts always to respect me and cherish me,
And to treat me just the same as my sisters and brothers.
No, not just the same, love me more than them!
Grandfather,
You have given me an abundance of 'human feeling' [goods for my trousseau].
My uncle [*shushu*] and auntie [*ashen*] have given me a whole padded coverlet for my trousseau,[57]
Making up the number with a coverlet of local cloth.
They also sent a quilt of foreign cloth, which looks pretty,[58]
And they sent a satin quilt, which is very expensive.
Just urge my parents to come up with more quilts,
So that when I go to the family of that name as their son's wife, I'll have a good name.

Thanking the [Maternal] Uncle (Xie niangjiu) [59]

The *niangjiu* (or *laoniangjiu*) is the older brother of the bride's mother. Within the family he has great authority; for example, he must be present at the wedding ceremony or it cannot be held (see Chapter 4). In thanking the uncle, the bride compliments him with images of authority (the cockscomb flower) and assures him that his generosity will ensure that the family wins face within the community.

When the cockscomb flower buds, its leaves point upwards.[60]
I turn to think about thanking my dear *niangjiu,*
Uncle,
You have kindly given me many gifts,
Many kindnesses you have shown to me.
You gave me a package of foreign silver coins.
Some of them bear [the image of] a small crane,
In the crane's mouth is a golden twig.[61]
The money you gave to me I will give to my father to use,[62]
All the other gifts, large and small, I will take to the family of that name to show off as part of my trousseau.[63]

You painfully saved these coins over a long time,
Stinting on yourself to save all this for me.
Once you gathered a thousand copper coins you kept it intact,[64]
The thousand copper coins you put to one side.
For a long time you bought only fish to eat, your family cooked only weak soup,[65]
In order to put on a good show and gain face.
Day after day you painfully saved this money.
Just as in the outer garden one grows radishes, and in the inner garden ginger,
So my uncle treats his niece just like his own daughter!

Thanking the Matchmaker 1 (Xie meiren 1) [66]

In the lament cycle of Pan Cailian one finds two laments addressed to the matchmaker, one a thanks (Xie meiren 1) and the other a curse (Xie meiren 2). The bride would choose one or the other depending on her level of satisfaction with the marriage arrangements. The following lament is addressed to the matchmaker hired by the bride's family. She and the Fortunate Woman are responsible for arranging the bride's hair and helping her with her costume. In Pan's rendition there is much comedy about the scanty hair on her head and the extreme difficulty of inserting the obligatory wedding ornaments.

Matchmaker sent by the groom's side, in the hall I thank you.
Matchmaker from my family, I enter the room to thank you.
It was our family's matchmaker who learned about me from my own mother's mouth.
From my father's hands you took the eight characters [required for casting the horoscope].
Before you wrote down the eight characters,
With your right hand you took up the brush with golden ink.
With your left hand you took up the paper that is red all over.
My day and hour of birth you wrote it dead in the middle.
My mother's name you wrote it on the side.
You wrote my day and hour of birth very prominently,
Then wrote my mother's name very casually.
Matchmaker,
You took [the red paper] and hurried about, going back and forth.
You took it to the outer wall,
Then hastened to the inner wall.
And gave it to the two in that house [the groom's parents]
But all they did was throw it out and toss it out!
They did not fancy it, they thought it was nothing special.
Matchmaker,
You simply rubbed your chest to let out the inner *qi* [a sign of frustration],
You bent your waist and curved your back [in anger] and held [the eight characters] in your hands.

You wanted to stuff it in a crack in the reed wall [at their rear].[67]
Then you called a fengshui master to compare the two horoscopes.
Matchmaker,
He compared the two horoscopes and found they halfway matched,[68]
You spoke to the seniors of that family and urged them to consider it.
Matchmaker,
Those who do matchmaking have to deceive both sides.
You can't serve as matchmaker if you repeat gossip to both sides,
Only those who can deceive ghosts and ghouls can be matchmakers!
Your speech must be flowery, like one who can make [dirty] water pure.
First, in speaking you must talk of [the bride's] fine appearance and excellent manners;
Second, you must speak of the huge size of her trousseau;
And that there is no need for gold, nor for silver.[69]
You did the thrice 'taking of tea' and the six ceremonies, you even had to send money to the groom's home![70]
Saying: 'How could you refuse, is there anything not accounted for?'[71]
Matchmaker,
When you spoke of my mother's rice water you called it sweet wine.[72]
You said of her heated rice wine that it was dew from Heaven.
Our radishes and bamboo shoots, you made much of these.
Not to mention the onions and garlic thrown in to make up the meal.
In that family, every three days they hold a big feast,
And every six days they throw a grand banquet.
They eat cured pork throughout the year and goat as well,
Three *dan* of pork and endless amounts of goat.[73]
Matchmaker,
In their home, beneath the motif on the ridgepole stand tables in rows.[74]
In their home, beneath the 'pearl lamps', they slice up their dishes.[75]
They carve up their salted meat into slim thin slices,
They chop up fresh meat into cubes and pile them into baskets.
They cut up boiled egg as quickly as the turn of a shuttle.
And slice up their chicken into three-cornered fillets.
Matchmaker
Their 'five-flavoured pork chops' are full-flavoured,
Sea cucumber and dried prawns—two [luxury] seafoods,
Crab claws and prawn soup, fresh-tasting.
That family has tables of marble and footstools of ivory,
They sit on embroidered cushions and place their feet on low stools.
With songs and pipe music they entertain the matchmaker.
. . . . . .
Matchmaker,
I've troubled you and bothered you,[76]
You gave me everything, from the top of my head to my feet.[77]

You gave me an entire set of clothing, all trim and proper;
You gave me a ten-dragon embroidered inset and nine-dragon stomacher,
A stomacher entirely studded with precious pearl and agate stones.
With my sunken mouth and crooked face, how could this be suitable for me?
Matchmaker,
I am a hole in the earlobe of my mother,
Just a pith of rice straw, that's all I've ever been.
You take seven pearls and agate stones, eight pearl cups.
You bid me turn this way and that, but where can they fit in?
You take up twelve gold clasps, pair on pair, all new,
You placed the gold pins out straight on a waxen board.
Clasps of all types, from top to toe,
A long clasp to join the open cloak, two or three pairs,
Long clasps to join the cloth skirt,
Short ones, long ones, to join the other garments.
Headband held with a blue-patterned clasp,
All kinds of exquisite butterfly clasps.
But my hair is thin, my birth hair was scarce.
You bought these hair clasps but there is nowhere to put them in.
You try time and time again to put them in, but where can they go?
There's nothing for it but to trouble you to take them back.
. . . . . .
Matchmaker,
The Jin family and the Sheng family, when they seek daughters-in-law,
They go looking for brides in Suzhou.
They look for women with small feet and fine figures from the towns,
They want some white-faced 'student', bookish women.[78]
Their home has a Dama who seeks a small-footed, fine-figured beauty, whose three-inch shoes are too big for her,
Who, when she takes a big step goes forward only an inch,
And when she takes a small step moves only a third of an inch.
Pit pat, pit pat, [she walks] like rain trickling down in a line from the sky.
They are used to seeking a bride with a rich trousseau.
They want a bride with a big dowry,
They want four wardrobes in a row,
Eight big chests paraded around,
Just like the homes facing each other in Datuan town.
Thirty-six boxes stacked in piles on the floor,
The top layer of boxes full of brocade and silk,
The lower layer of boxes full of leather goods,
With golden keys and silver locks.
When you open the boxes there are many leather goods,
Nanjing keys and Beijing locks.
New types of cases that open on the side,

With 'butterfly hinges', they'll love that.
When you open the boxes, there is a lot of brocade,
And clothing made of cotton fills the corners of the room.
Fine clothing, to wear any day you like.[79]
When they marry off their women, their daughters wear glamourous clothes,
They seek to get brides with lavish trousseaus.
In that family they seek women of impressive appearance and excellent manners.
But now they're getting this yellow earthenware bowl—common rough goods,
When what they wanted was a fine wine goblet, exquisite handiwork!

Thanking the Matchmaker 2 (Xie meiren 2)[80]

In "Thanking the Matchmaker", the bride, far from thanking her, actually hurls abuse at her. Much is made of the alleged infertility of the matchmaker. Her presumed lust but lack of procreative power is described in crude sexual terms. She is ordered to wear a red wedding gown and ride on an upturned bench like an animal. A "hat without a penis" (a soft hat) and "limp shoe-covers" are (metaphorically) placed on her head. In this segment, the bride's ritual power apparently stems from her own blighted destiny. She has brought misfortune on her natal family and will do the same to the groom's family. The same sorry fate will bring disaster to the matchmaker.

Generically, this segment is akin to a ritual curse. Similar curses of the matchmaker are found in other lamentation traditions (see Tan 1990, 136–140; Xu 1991, 189–192). The matchmaker is an indispensable but often reviled figure in the Chinese tradition. With her "oily mouth" (deceitful speech) she is condemned for exaggerating the assets of both households in order to effect the union and win gifts from both sides. The accusations of deceit by the matchmaker parallel the more subtle criticism of the mother for her "extravagant words" about the bride's future. Here the bride seeks to strip away the ceremonial aspect of the marriage and expose the commercial side of the transaction—she is being sold in marriage just like the buying and selling of fields.

You confused the Eight Characters and matched us all wrong.
You became a matchmaker because you can have no children,
You made this worthless match—what kind of matchmaker are you!
When you spoke with us you said that their rice and cotton was excellent,
You have married me into this family, with their jade-white shirts and rolled-up sleeves.
With this family you can't tell if they're good or bad.
It's all your fault, matchmaker, you've done a dreadful job,
I don't blame anyone else,
I blame only you—matchmaker!
Matchmaker,
You ate their fish heads, but it only addled your brains.
You ate their greasy noodles—slippery soft.
You ate their meatballs and threw the brocade ball.

Matchmaker,
Turn the bench upside down and sit on it,
Matchmaker, ride astride it like a horse.
Place a hat without a penis on your bitch head,
Place a limp shoe-cover and floppy hat on your bitch head,
Place a red wedding gown on your bitch head.
Matchmaker,
Only those with no descendants can be matchmakers.
It is my destiny to set a curse on you,
To blight your life and your whole family.
Living in my mother's home I have brought misfortune on them.
When I live with my mother-in-law, I will lead their family to ruin.
When spinning and weaving, the yarn will snap,
In buying and selling fields, the go-between will die.
It is my destiny to blight your life.
Die, matchmaker, together with all your family!

Thanking the Fortunate Woman (Xie mama) [81]

The role of the Fortunate Woman (a ritual specialist known as *xiniang*) is described in Chapter 4. The bride's main intention here is to reiterate the intimacy between the family of the mama and her own family, her status as an old and respected friend of the family, and her care of the young girl from her infancy. The bride will apologize copiously for not being able to pay her a large enough package but will seek to repay her by calling in all the family members in turn to thank the Fortunate Woman.

Mama,
On ordinary days I find nothing to say,
At normal times I have no words to thank you.
But today, this special day, I thank you deeply.
Mama, you were the very first to cut my hair at one month.
From the age of two or three I grew plaits [coiled] like peaches,
At fifteen and sixteen I arranged my hair in full bunches,
At seventeen and eighteen you combed my hair [like a young lady],
Today you have been doing my hair for twenty years.
Mama,
Thank you and thank you again.
You would get up early and go back late to come and visit me.
My mama, you came bearing a heart just like my own birth mother, to care for me,
My mama, when you had free time you would come and see me,
In your busy life you managed to spend time with me.
In the midst of your busy life you generously gave your time,
To come and see this small girl to teach me how to work.
But all this [woman's] work, I can't do any of it!

You are a three-day mama, a six-day *niang*,[82]
The 'door-crossing mama' is even better than a birth mother,
You instruct me in everything and warn me.
Mama,
You are a white-faced scholar, like my father,[83]
With a ruddy face like my mother.
Today I kneel down to you, head on the ground, and thank you deeply.
My mother's home is bare, our hands are tight,
When we dye our clothes, our dye is not blue enough,
When I make clothing, there is not enough cloth for a shirt.
I have no blue-print skirt to offer you,
I have no cloth shirt to give you,
I have no cloth padding from the tray to give you,[84]
But mama does not consider these things or take them into account.
You care for me and value me. . . .

A Bowl of Rice (Yi wan fan)

"A Bowl of Rice" is one of the most poignant moments in the entire ritual. The bride is now just about to be carried away from her home. The mother sits down on her bed and, sobbing, warns her daughter one final time to obey the rules of the groom's household. The bride cries in response. The elder brother's wife *(saosao)* ceremoniously brings in a bowl of rice on a tray. She makes three signs on the bride's mouth. The bride then throws herself on the *saosao* and sobs again. At this point she performs "A Bowl of Rice". It is the sister-in-law, as substitute mother, who is invoked at this parting performance, a ritual that has all the drama of the last meal given to the convicted before execution. In fact, in the Jiangsu-Zhejiang region generally, a last morsel of rice is placed in the mouth of a person on the verge of death *(linbie fan)*. The bride ritually refuses to eat the rice and instead urges the *saosao* to give it to family members, to whom it will bring not death but life, indeed extraordinary vitality. From the generic point of view, this lament is a blessing, expressed in the same hyperbolic language and with the same magical force as the curse placed on the matchmaker. The bride's ritual power as she departs contrasts strongly with her earlier self-portrayal as a woman of blighted destiny who can bring nothing but ill luck to those around her. It is only by her symbolic death, however, that this transformation from self-abnegation to charismatic power is effected.

"A Bowl of Rice"[85] was a key part of the lament repertoire in this area and was transmitted in very similar form from one lamenter to another.[86] Two other transcripts of this lament are found in almost verbatim form; see the laments of Ji Liangmei of Nanhui and Xu Xiaomei, also of Nanhui (*Zhongguo minjian gequ jicheng,* 748).

Saosao,
Many thanks to you.
The chrysanthemum-patterned bowl, with the fancy style,
You bear it on a four-cornered tray, walking with solemn slow steps in the side room.

But today, this bowl of rice, I do not want to eat it,
Give it to my father to eat.
Once he eats it, his ears will resound like a copper bell,
His eyes will gaze like a far-seeing telescope,
He will see as far as a thousand leagues.
Or perhaps I could give it to my elder brother to eat,
If he eats this rice he can go to Nanjing and take the imperial exams, winning a red official's cap.
At the examination hall in Nanjing he will win a bejewelled blue hat,
The gold-decorated blue hat will sit securely on his head.
Or perhaps you should give it to my nephew to eat,
Once he eats this he will be able to read square-form characters,
Next he will read the Thousand Character Classic,
And after that the Hundred Surnames.
He will be able to read the seventy-two books fluently.
Large characters he will write clearly and easily,
His small characters will be as delicate as lotus roots,
He will love to read books as much as to eat rice, and when he goes to school will become famous.

Saosao,

May I trouble you, may I bother you,
Give this bowl of rice to my niece.
If my niece eats this bowl of rice
Then she will learn cross-stitch and *chaxiu* stitch so well she will get to sit in the [emperor's] dragon chamber.
She'll embroider mice so true to life they will appear to climb up the wall,
She'll embroider cats that look as if they can leap down to the ground,
And ducks that appear to leap about,
Her embroidered chickens will look as if they can fly,
Her embroidered dragons will be able to sip water.
Now I have caused you a lot of trouble and bother,
This bowl of rice, I don't want to eat it,
My sister-in-law, you eat it,

Saosao,

You'll be able to wind the cotton skein so tight it seems part of the bobbin,
Your skein will be as tight as stone on the bobbin.
Saosao, you will link up the warp and weft at the start as quickly as the strike of a bell.
In less than an evening, you will weave three small bolts of cloth.
In less than a day, you will complete four large bolts of cloth.
With your right hand you'll weave the hem of the satin,
While with your left you'll do the hem of 'feather-silk' cloth,
When you take it to Shanghai town it will be hailed as top quality.

Saosao,

This bowl of rice, may I trouble you, may I bother you.

Give it to my grandmother to eat.
If my grandmother eats this bowl of rice,
Her snow-white hair will turn crow-black once more,
She will lose no more teeth, those lost will grow again.
Saosao,
I'm tiring you, I'm troubling you.
Place this bowl of rice at the foot of my mother's bed,
Boiling vapor will steam and steam, rising up and up,
A hot mist will seethe and seethe, surging ever higher,
With each passing year it will rise, with each month it will rise!
To the east, we'll buy land as far as the ocean's shore,
For fish, we can catch crabs and prawns with ease,
To the north, we'll buy fields beyond the emperor's very palace.
Our 'uncle', the emperor, will smile upon us,
To the south, we'll buy land as far as Yunnan.
Then my older brother will find it easy to travel here and there.
To the west, we'll buy land as far as Shanghai itself.
So my older brother can readily eat fresh food on his way,
Wherever we go we'll get cheap goods, just as we please!

Thanking the Brother's Wife (Xie saosao) [87]

With her address to the wife of her elder brother, the bride's strategy is to be extremely complimentary, flattering her for her superlative skills, thanking her effusively for her generosity, and constantly hinting at her authority within the household. In spite of the flattery, the address to the sister-in-law implies subtle denigration of the way the *saosao* has reversed the usual Confucian hierarchy, where the bride's mother and father should take pride of place. It is also a recognition of the reality of the situation. When the older brother marries, the younger sister feels displaced by his wife who, ideally, then becomes a second mother to her, but more often becomes a powerful rival. Sometimes the mother can secretly give the bride extra goods, which in turn can be denied by the *saosao*. Behind the bride's effusive compliments, then, lies an ambivalent relationship based on rivalry and need. Once the bride is married, if she meets with hardship it is to her older brother and his wife that she must turn.

To persuade the *saosao* to act on her behalf, the bride makes use of two very important notions, *renqing* and *changmian. Renqing,* literally "human emotion or sensibility", refers to the idealised relations between human beings that exist when the correct protocols are carried out in accordance with where each stands within the hierarchy. More concretely, *renqing* refers to favours or gifts. In this case, as the bride reminds the *saosao,* it is incumbent on the senior woman to give generously to the trousseau in order to gain face through lavish display *(changmian).*

This passage contains much parallelism of line structure. For instance, lines 5, 7, 6, and 8 echo each other in structure. Verbs are repeated within each line from 12 to 14, and there is an abundance of four or five syllabic images that can be only weakly paraphrased

in translation—for example, "dew water broad broad" (referring to spittle), "remnant bits and slanting angles" (referring to scraps of cloth). The metaphorical "dark plum rice mix the gruel" parallels "stove pot scum wash the face" on the next line. Both are self-references to the bride as a black-hearted ingrate. Elements of this lament and "The Bowl of Rice" are found mingled in a lament of Jin Afu, also of Nanhui.[88]

Saosao,
Thanks to you, many thanks.
It is you who, setting store on our relationship, have given me much.
Valuing our relationship, you have given me many favours,
Saosao, on important occasions you serve as hostess, welcoming guests.
You gave me new indigo-printed cloth to add to my trousseau,
You gave me satin coverlets and helped my father spread out the bedding to add to the show.
You have given me cloth thirty-six feet long,
You helped my father to wrap up the coverlets and fold them into pairs.
Saosao, you toil in your room, sprinkling abundant dew as you weave.[89]
[Like] a steady wind and quiet ripples you clean the cloth.
You pound more rapidly than the pole on the spinning machine.
My sister-in-law, in brushing the yarn you brush it out evenly,
In making ready the cloth you draw it out tightly,
In weaving, you weave it close and fine.
It is you, sister-in-law, who teaches me to take pains in spinning and weaving.
It is you, sister-in-law, who helps me to tie the first threads to the loom.
You help me get rid of the leftover ends of the yarn,
You help me smooth out rough spots on the yarn
From the first point down to the final knot.
Right from the start you help me rid the cloth of soiled spots.
Saosao, in using string to count my cloth, you're very generous.[90]
In threading the warp yarn into the holes, you give me 'face'.
You let me take the remaining scraps of cloth,
Even the trimmings that fall from the scissors, you give them all to me.
There are not even enough odd-shaped clippings to make a stomacher for my nephew,
Nor any curved bits and pieces to make soles for his shoes.
I am a black-hearted person, black as dark-plum gruel.
I have a wicked heart—I wash my face in black scum from the wok.
I complain if there is too little, but never if there is too much,
Sister-in-law, you toil through the night so I can put up a good show!

On Being Carried to the Bridal Chair (Bao shang jiao) [91]

It is now the task of the older brother *(age)* or his representative to carry the bride from her bedside to the bridal chair. The older brother, whose destiny it is to become a mater-

nal uncle *(niangjiu)* in his turn, is a vitally important figure to the bride. If the groom's family should mistreat her, it is to the brother that she will turn for protection. It is also her brother and his wife who have the final say on goods in her trousseau. With her older brother, the bride reiterates his great generosity, and that of his wife, and reminds him this will give the family face in the community, including even the nearby township of Datuan. She appeals to his sense of honour (she will be "like a bird in a cage" or "a criminal in jail" once married) and his courage (she hyperbolically describes the groom's family as powerful, wealthy, and fierce). She hopes that he will invite her home for all major occasions. Unless he does invite her she dares not take her leave. Her continued contact with her natal family thus hinges on him giving her 'face' in her new family.[92]

Older brother,
Now as I depart, how can I thank you?
As a young child, I wore a shirt of indigo and a waistband of blue,
I clapped and laughed for you to hug me,
But today, standing on the plank, when you embrace me you wrong me grievously.
Older brother,
You have given me many presents,
So many kindnesses you have given me.
You must say some favourable words to my father,
Say words of agreement to my mother.[93]
Give me a little more cloth [for the trousseau]
So that it looks as if father has provided well for me.
Older brother,
Our father's home is bare, our hands are tight.
My brother, through the four seasons of the year you and *saosao* have worked hard to support us.
Older brother,
Tomorrow night when the guests gather, please be sure to arrive early.
If you can't come before dinner, then come after dinner.
When the moon has already fallen and is covered by black clouds,
Take some small lanterns and set off early.
Older brother,
At the outer wall [of the groom's house] they have a white dog to bite you,
At the inner wall there is a black dog to bite you,
With stone lions on both sides of the entrance as fierce as tigers,
When you go through to the inner wall, watch out
As you reach the grand entrance, take great care,
Older brother,
From now on by day I will be a bird in a cage,
By night I will be kept as in prison,
But when you come they will withdraw the big sticks and little sticks.
As with a criminal in prison, they will be more lenient [when you come].
My brother, when you go by boat past that place [the groom's home], be sure to stand up tall,[94]

When you reach that place, be sure to bring the boat in close.
Don't seek dark shadowy places to hide away from me,
Don't stick to the clumps of reeds by the bank to get away from me.[95]
Don't let me live like a bird in a cage, do not just pass by without seeing me.
When I live in their prison, don't just pole by as if you do not know me.
Older brother,
I am a northern worm eating southern mud.[96]
I do not know whether you will come or not hereafter,[97]
It is truly hard to become a daughter-in-law in another home.
Bitter suffering, time after time, without any ending.
Older brother,
At the year's end and at the autumn harvest, invite me back.
At the spring festival, be sure to come and see me.
In their home they have many rules and regulations.
I will be like a carp in a ditch leaping out of the water [expecting you to come]
If you don't invite me home, how can I ever return?
When the red beans blossom, the paddy fields are ready [to harvest],
All through the year you are busy in the fields,
But brother, if you don't call for me, how can I ever come home?
. . . . . .

On the Bridal Sedan (Jiaozi) [98]

This song is performed by the bride as she settles into the bridal sedan sent by the groom's family and contains the twists and turns in her thinking as she sets off away from her home. Once again, she worries about the humble nature of her natal abode and the tiny size of the yard. She anticipates the solemn ceremony on arrival, the noise of fireworks, the imposing lanterns at the entrance, and her mother-in-law "opening the boxes" *(kaixiang)* so that her humble items are displayed for all to see. The trousseau, which she has a moment before imagined as "rising to the gate of Heaven", now appears in her mind's eye to be so light as to be virtually invisible. For the first time she sees her future husband. He is described as wearing the stiff formal hat of an official. She feels overcome with emotion. What will they think when they draw back the curtain of the sedan and see her at last, small and insignificant as she is? Worst of all will be the sisters-in-law and their looks of scorn and contempt. This lament ends on a note of despair. She is not even worthy to be their humblest servant girl![99]

That family has many rules and codes of etiquette,
The large and small sedan chairs have all arrived.[100]
But my mother cannot go in the small sedan.[101]
The size of the sedans is not a problem,
But their large sedan chair has no ceremonial rug,
And the small sedan has no bamboo mat.
The yard outside our house is only the size of a leaf.
The big red sedan chair has no space to set down,

At my mother's home, the eaves are so low they touch the ground!
As for the golden cymbals, pennants, and bridal umbrella, there is no room to put them down.
Our main hall is so small, so tiny,
The band of musicians have no place to sit.
The groom's party have come with twenty-four barrows—each one spanking new,
All newly made barrows with fine timber axles.
Bells tinkle as the wheels turn on the black lacquered shaft.
A three-legged barrow comes bearing snacks,
Each single leg has carved designs.
But in my mother's home there is no large yard,
So the newly made barrows have no place to set down.
They have come with thirty-six fine stallions to bear away the bride.
Their front hooves curving up like the hooks on weighing scales,
The back hooves stretching out like iron cudgels,
The horses' saddles, encircling their backs,
The horses' stirrups, hanging from both sides.
From the horses' necks hang a cluster of copper bells
In the horses' mouths, the bits are held firm.
In my mother's house we have not planted thirty-six trees,
These high-headed white horses, where can they be tethered?
In the red bridal chair, the railing is inset with pearl,
The chair turns round and around in my mother's yard.
The poles are decorated with gold leaf, so bright they dazzle the eye,
The red lacquer poles now face the main gate.
On three sides are panes of foreign patterned glass,[102]
The four-cornered canopy covers the bride.
When they draw open the curtains, I'll look so grotesque!
When I draw back the red cloth, I look like a speckled duck—so hideous!
Suddenly in the pit of my stomach I feel struck by terror.
There is a yellow copper foot warmer, which also serves as a footrest,
The chair has armrests of boxwood to prop me up,
On the red bridal chair is a canopy with tassels.
[The trousseau] is all wrapped up in cinnabar-red and dark-blue cloth,[103]
[Bowls and basins] are stacked up like calabashes, as high as the gate of Heaven.
. . . . . .
As my bridal chair leaves home, they call me back three times.
Even if we had a large fortune, I now have no share in it.
Once gone beyond the eaves, I have no share in the family fortune.
Once beyond the backyard, I become an outsider.
When I return on the third day (after marriage), I will feel so wronged,
When I return to eat and talk with my family, I will feel so aggrieved,
When I am borne to their grand entrance,

They will set off twelve tall firecrackers, rising as high as the gate of Heaven.
I will be so terrified my sweat will flow like rain!
My skin will grow pimples from fright—as large as duck eggs!
When I come to face their main gate,
Where the fine lanterns hang on both sides of the entrance,
With the dowry my mother gave me—the boxes and bedding.
We could not afford twenty-four 'legs' of furniture,[104]
And eighteen 'legs' will appear too few,
When taken to their place, it will not be found suitable.
They have a Fortunate Woman to lay out the satin coverlet and mattress on the marital bed.
Amongst these are thin coverlets [for summer],[105]
Blue-patterned curtains surround the bed,
Eighteen sons play there, gazing up to Heaven,[106]
And clothing frames to hang all their clothing.
I [will] feel so frustrated [that my trousseau is so small],
They will take my red lacquer boxes—so little inside!
They will carry them to and fro—so empty and bare!
On the road the sedan carriers will test the weight of my trousseau,
When they take them to that house—at the gate they will laugh and throw it all away.
They will take the red boxes with the copper locks,
When they open the boxes they will find them empty,
There will be no patterned cloth with many colours,
There will be no fine-quality cloth to add to the pile,
There will be no padded cotton clothing in the heap,
Nor any dark-blue scarves to cover one's face,
I have just an ordinary cloth skirt to pack into the barrel.

. . . . . .

They are just like wealthy families, like the Jins and Shengs, who serve as officials in the *yamen,*
But I am just a poor miserable girl,
I have received from them one packet of gold and another of silver.
When the large tray was accepted it went to buy rice and fuel to cook,[107]
My own father and mother used it to buy oil, soy sauce, and coarse rice cakes.
When the small tray was received it was treated like money to spend, what a terrible shame!

. . . . . .

In their home they have a Dama, who seeks a bride of fine appearance and good manners,
With small feet and a neat figure, one from the townships,
Whose three-inch shoes are way too big,
A pale-faced scholar with a melon-shaped face.

My face is yellow like a cucumber slice,
When they draw back the curtain [on the sedan], they won't find a proper person at all!
Standing I look as scrawny as firewood,
Sitting I look like an owl,
My shoulder blades sticking up, not the right goods at all.
At their home there is a Dama who seeks a bride from the upper apartments,
But they have taken me, someone from the coast,
Just a yellow earthen bowl, crude and rough,
But they have brides like lightly engraved goblets, exquisite goods![108]
If they want to eat meat they can take it from the kitchen cupboard,
If they want to eat fruit then just beyond their window is a fine bamboo garden.
Surrounding the bamboo plantation is a small plot for vegetables,
Melons and eggplants are in the rear garden,
Peaches and plums, they have all sorts.
They took the wrong eight characters and mistakenly accepted me,
They got it all wrong and made a mistaken match.
How could the family of that name want someone like me?
They took brides from homes like the Jins' and the Shengs'.
They can get brides from the upper and lower apartments,
But they have chosen a poor wretch of a girl,
I have no hat for my head, no stockings for my feet.
My skirt is not on properly,
I have not one hat for my head,
My hair is thin, my birth hair was scanty,
Pearl and agate pendants will not twirl from my hair,
But they can just buy false pigtails you flick up and down.
My hair is thin, my birth hair was scanty,
Pearl and agate pendants won't bob from my hair, we'd best send them back.
They take up the ten-dragon inset, nine-dragon stomacher,
But with my sunken mouth and crooked face, how could this suit me?
It is my mother's home that is bare, their hands are tight,
Even my coarse blue-print clothing does not look straight.
They gave me a three-inch sleeved [shirt], just to my taste,
They prepared a six-inch sleeved [shirt] for me to wear.
But I am scrawny like a bunch of firewood,
My hair uncombed, like fine brushwood.
Their mother bought me some hair clasps, but I cannot use them,
It's best to send back the pearl and agate clasps.
I thank them and thank them again.
It's my own mother's home that is a shack of reeds,
The rafters lack a central beam.
I am just a yellow sandy-grained bowl, just rough, crude goods.
Our meal table lacks a leg and wobbles,

The table lacks a leg, the goblets and chopsticks are in disarray.
On my behalf you passed on the red letter [with my horoscope] and calculated the gifts.[109]
You did a good job as matchmaker,
I now go to the family of that name as their son's wife.
Their Dama can weave three bolts of cloth in a day,
She can spin raw cotton at half a *jin* a day,
In the morning she does half a *jin* and in the evening eight *liang* [half a *jin*],[110]
In one day she can spin twenty-four *liang*.[111]
Her spun cotton is as large as a copper tray,
It is rolled tight as a stone like a copper pipe,
She can weave cloth as rapidly as the stroke of a bell.
But when I spin cotton, I have to feel the spindle,
When I weave cloth the shuttle jumps unsteadily,
With the poplar shuttle I don't know the right side from the wrong.
The thick bamboo pole [used in spinning], I don't know how to hold it,
Four-cornered palm leaves, I don't know which directions they point.
On top they have a Dama, adept and capable,
Carrying weights with a shoulder pole, she can do all of that.
She can wield a knife to make fine paper patterns,[112]
In embroidery she is famed for her lovely work.
If I served as her lowliest servant I still would not satisfy her,
Even serving as her housemaid, I would be useless.
Above they have a Dama, with her scornful eyes,
Below the aunties will glower at me,
They will make eyes at me in order to instruct me,
They blink their eyes to warn me,
Whatever they say, good or bad, this small girl cannot figure it out.
When they knit their brows and glare at me, I don't even notice.
Fine taste or bad taste, I can't tell them apart.
Their Dama and aunties will try to train me,
They will treat me like rotten goods in order to instruct me,
They will treat me like this in order to warn me,
When I am the youngest daughter-in-law it will be so miserable, I can't express the shame!
I cannot use the shuttle and am a stranger to the loom.
When I am living with the senior women of that family,
Even as their lowliest servant, I cannot give satisfaction.

On the Bridal Boat (Qu qin chuan)[113]

On the bridal boat the bride is overwhelmed with the splendour of the boat. She describes the calling-back ceremony performed by her brother, when the boat is temporarily moored by the bank. The canal near her abode is choked with reeds and the groom almost slips in

the mud when disembarking. She imagines the supposed grandeur of their destination, so different to the home of her birth.

That family wants a good show, an elaborate display.
They brought in choice timber from Xishan estate [to make the boat].
They invited in carpenters from Tangdong,
And called for carpenters and blacksmiths to their home.
Nails of iron were struck in their furnace,
The boat, though small, looks splendid!
It is made from famed cypress timber, fit for lofty rafters,
The lacquered timber railing gleams brightly.
Such a finely built boat will become famous.
Like a foreign hat with a big red crown,
And ornate upturned brim, new made last year.
A gold-gloss wicker mat lies on the central seat,
A boxwood chair with armrests to support me,
And a yellow-copper foot warmer to rest my feet.
The brother who comes for the bride [the groom] sits at the stern;
The brother who moors the boat [male relative] sits at the prow.
The mother who comes for the bride [Fortunate Woman] sits in the central berth.
So how can this young-shoot bride find somewhere to sit down?
They pole down towards the water-bridge in my mother's place,
But in my mother's place there is no water-bridge in the east,
And no water-bridge in the west.
They curve this way and that, seeking a water-bridge.
Weeds grow wildly, clogging up the riverbank,
Reeds clump thickly, forming dark alleyways,
The water-bridge is caked with mud, ducks wander to and fro,
Our tiny tiny boat finds nowhere to land.
The brother who comes for the bride, he pulls out his front foot but his back foot sinks deeper into the mud.
They have a seven-strand hawser to tie up the boat,
And a gold-plated anchor to hold it firm.
The gangplank of boxwood is laid down,
A pole with gay bunting is set up on the bank.
From afar, their red-lacquer boat looks just like new,
Like a fashionable gauze-black decorated barge,
But in reality it is just a broken-down sludge dredger,
Just a bridal sedan with a rudder, moving along the river ways.
My brothers, where are they to call me back?
On top, I hear the sound of people talking,
Below, I hear the sound of water rushing.
Tell my mother not to worry about her daughter,
There's nothing for it, this northern worm eats southern mud,

I don't know whether in days to come I will return.[114]
Raise the boxwood gangplank,
Set down the bunting-pole,
Draw in the seven-stranded hawser.
Their house, on the east, is the eastern water-bridge,
In the west is the western water-bridge.
To the east of their home is a water-bridge of stone,
The water-bridge is [curved] like a horse's saddle, [as beautiful as] Lake Taihu,
Curving round and round, they [finally] moor the boat.
By their home, by the central gate, stands a tall poplar tree,
Behind their home is an osmanthus tree,
Their great trees face the guest hall,
The small trees face the kitchen stove.[115]
When I go to their home as daughter-in-law,
I will walk down steps of stone to the water-bridge,
I will wash rice and draw water and not get my feet wet.
A bamboo fence stretches right down to the riverbank,
In washing rice and drawing water, I will need to be on my guard.

The House (Fangzi) [116]

This is the finale of Pan's lament cycle. The bride will continue lamenting only to the moment when the groom's house comes into view, because it would be unlucky to lament beyond this point. In "The House" the bride expresses her fear at being overwhelmed by a household much bigger and wealthier than her own, a household with unknown rules and protocols that she must master as best she can.

In their mansion they have twenty-four chimneys,
Their family is thriving, teeming with people.
They have three rows of rooms and four reception halls,
Four walls engraved with *yinyang* [icons] enclose the large courtyard.
In each room the corners are inset with exquisite copper,
Each rafter is made of choice timber,
At their home the threshold is gold and the lintels of silver.
In their home, they have many silver bars,
They have great wealth, power, and influence,
And many household rules and codes of propriety.
They have an eastern hall and a western hall.
The eastern hall is for weaving cloth,
The western wall is for women's embroidery.
Right in the middle is the large hall,
The Dama and senior wives sit there with the new person [the bride].
As small and poor as I am, how can I sit with them?
When they open the rear gate, there is a bamboo garden three *mu* in size,

Beyond the bamboo clump is a vegetable garden,
In their home, the fence goes right down to the riverside,
Stepping stones lead all the way to the water-bridge of stone.
In washing rice and drawing water, there is no need to get wet feet.
They have a small stove with two burners to cook
And a three-burner stove with a wooden plank,
They have a large stove with four burners.
The stove with five burners is curved and round,
On the stove are painted coloured figures.
The Stove God [print] looks [strict] like a grandfather.
The foreign chimneys have rich patterns,
The tall chimneys send smoke straight up to Heaven.
The number-six-size wok can hold twenty-five *jin,*
The number-eight-size wok can hold thirty *jin,*
The *liu er* [large] wok can hold thirty *jin.*
The short stirring stick is useless here,
How will I know their rules for cooking gruel and rice?
The lid on their largest wok weighs twenty *jin,*
I could not lift it with one hand.
If I use two hands I will be embarrassed in front of them.
They measure out their grain in *dou,*
And use an earthern *zeng* pot to steam their rice.
How can I follow their rules in cooking rice and gruel?
If I cook too much, I will break their rules,
If I cook too little, I will show my humble birth.
They wield their [huge] spatulas with ease, like the official signs warning "keep away";[117]
They bear their copper scoops as lightly as a goose-feather fan;
The clean-water hole looks like a [deep] dragon-tail pond;[118]
The pure water on the stove is dark and deep.
Their chopstick holder is made from select timber,
A pair of ivory chopsticks is placed at the centre,
Silken towels hang on shiny hooks.
My skin is too rough and dirty, how can I match this?
Olive-shaped water pitchers, arrayed in rows beneath the stove,
Lotus-flower pitchers in rows with clean blue water.[119]
How can this young girl carry such big pitchers?
At my mother's home I could not cook even three small measures of rice,
When I cook gruel and rice I don't follow any strict rules.
I don't know how to cook even three coin-size pieces of bean curd.
Going to their house to be a daughter-in-law,
Above is the rice of the Dama, as fragrant as sticky rice,
The gruel she makes is sweet as dates,
Her bean curd tastes like salty meat,

But the rice I make has grass and seeds in it.[120]
In the bottom are river snails,
In the middle the rice is raw,
The rice is cooked on the top and raw underneath.
I eat hard uncooked rice,
The mother-in-law likes her rice a little hard,
The father-in-law likes his rice a little soft,
So how can I manage, how can I cook for them?
The rice should have ten edges and nine corners,
Each grain of rice should be distinct and even,
At my mother's home I ate meals she had cooked,
So how can I know the rules for making rice and gruel?

Notes

Introduction

1. "Niangjia kude ying tian xiang/Pojia jiadang tata zhang," in *Pudong lao xianhua,* produced by the Pudong lao xianhua bianweihui (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2004), 139.

2. "Nan pa zuo wenzhang/Nü pa ku liang sheng." Source: Nanhui informants. One could also interpret this saying as "We fear when men write compositions/We fear when women sing laments". This 'fear' relates to the perceived difficulty of both types of 'performance'.

3. On cosmic resonance, see Richard Von Glahn, *The Sinister Way: The Divine and the Demonic in Chinese Religious Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 14–15.

4. The major exception is recent scholarship on works composed in Women's Script; see, for example, the work of anthropologists Cathy Silber and Liu Fei-wen discussed below. Across China, women commonly participated in performance and ritual genres such as storytelling, opera, Buddhist ritual forms, and shamanism. For a survey of recent scholarship on the expressive culture of Chinese women, see Gail Hershatter, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 13–15. For an overview of women's participation in ritual, see Hill Gates, *China's Motor: A Thousand Years of Petty Capitalism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 177–203. Von Glahn discusses female mediums in *Sinister Way,* 185–186, 205–206, 232. For examples of women's expressive culture in the Pearl River delta, see Rubie S. Watson, "Girls' Houses and Working Women: Expressive Culture in the Pearl River Delta, 1900–41," in Maria Jaschok and Suzanne Miers, eds., *Women and Chinese Patriarchy* (London and New Jersey: Hong Kong University Press and Zed Books, 1994), 25–44. I have discussed the involvement of Nanhui women in Buddhist storytelling *(xuanjuan),* Shanghai opera, shamanism, and folk songs in "Chinese Cultural Revivalism: Changing Gender Constructions in the Yangtze River Delta", in Maila Stivens and Krishna Sen, eds., *Gender and Power in Affluent Asia* (London: Routledge, 1998), 205–209.

5. "Women Who De-Silence Themselves: Male-Illegible Literature (Nüshu) and Female-Specific Songs (Nüge) in Jiangyong County, Hunan Province, China" (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 1997), 273.

6. Discussed in Gloria G. Raheja and Ann Grodzins Gold, eds., *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1–29.

7. O. Harris, "The Power of Signs: Gender, Culture and the Wild in the Bolivian Andes", in C. MacCormack and M. Strathern, eds., *Nature, Culture, and Gender* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

8. Loring M. Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).

9. Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

10. Margaret T. Egnor, "Internal Iconicity in Paṛaiyuar 'Crying Songs'", in Stuart H. Blackburn and A. K. Ramanujan, eds., *Another Harmony: New Essays in the Folklore of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 294–344.

11. Joel Sherzer, "A Diversity of Voices: Men's and Women's Speech in Ethnographic Perspective", in Susan U. Philips and Christine Tanz, eds., *Language, Gender and Sex in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 95–120.

12. Angela Bourke, "More in Anger Than in Sorrow: Irish Women's Lament Poetry", in Joan N. Radner, ed., *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 160–182.

13. Raheja and Gold, *Listen to the Heron's Words.*

14. Laura Graham, "Three Modes of Shavante Vocal Expression: Wailing, Collective Singing, and Political Oratory", in Joel Sherzer and Greg Urban, eds., *Native South American Discourse* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1986), 83–118.

15. Sherzer, "A Diversity of Voices", 112–113.

16. Dorothy C. Holland and Debra G. Skinner, "Contested Ritual, Contested Femininities: (Re)forming Self and Society in a Nepali Women's Festival", *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 2 (1995): 279–305.

17. Benedicte Grima, "The Role of Suffering in Women's Performance of Paxto", in Arjun Appadurai et al., *Gender, Genre and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 78–101.

18. Elizabeth Tolbert, "The Voice of Lament: Female Vocality and Performative Efficacy in the Finnish-Karelian *Itkuvirsi*", in Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones, eds., *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 182–183.

19. See the studies of Liu Fei-wen, particularly "From Being to Becoming: Nüshu and Sentiments in a Chinese Rural Community", *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 3 (2004): 422–439.

20. Raheja and Gold, *Listen to the Heron's Words,* 13, 18.

21. Stanley Tambiah, "*Bridewealth and Dowry* Revisited", *Current Anthropology* 30, no. 4 (1989): 418.

22. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women", *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990): 41–54.

23. "From Daughter to Daughter-in-law in the Women's Script of Southern Hunan", in Christina K. Gilmartin, Gail Hershatter, Lisa Rofel, and Tyrene White, eds., *Engendering*

China: Women, Culture and the State (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 59. She does, however, point out that the Women's Script texts "unmistakably voice resistance" (ibid., 47).

24. "Wenti yu wenjing de duihua: Nüshu sanzhaoshu yu funü de qingyi yinsheng", *Taiwan renlei xuekan* 3, no. 1 (2005): 87–142. For the words cited, see the English abstract on page 142.

25. "Literacy, Gender, and Class: *Nüshu* and Sisterhood Communities in Southern Rural Hunan", *Nan Nü* 6, no. 2 (2004): 277–278. See also her "The Confrontation between Fidelity and Fertility: Nüshu, Nüge, and Peasant Women's Conceptions of Widowhood in Jiangyong County, Hunan Province, China", *Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 4 (2001): 1051–1084.

26. On oral traditions, their composition, performance, transmission, and poetic art, see the classic study of Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), especially chaps. 1–3; on oral poetry, see Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1st publ. 1977; rev. ed. 1992), and *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

27. Liu Fei-wen notes the highly formulaic content of laments sung by the women of Jiangyong County; see "Women Who De-Silence Themselves," 399–401.

28. On the importance of the 'dramaturgical' features of the performance of oral traditions and the "limitations of the meaning-centred approach", see Edward I. Schieffelin's study of the Kaluli, "Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality", *American Ethnologist* 12, no. 4 (1985): 707–724.

29. "Genres of Memory and the Memory of Genres: 'Forgetting' Lament in Bangladesh", *Comparative Study of Society and History* 44, no. 1 (2002): 159–185.

30. Tolbert, "The Voice of Lament", 184–186.

31. Ibid., 186.

32. "Women Who De-Silence Themselves", 272–296.

33. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History,* 14.

34. Ibid., 101.

35. Ibid., 86.

36. Ibid., 101.

37. Ibid., 105–106.

38. Ibid., 108.

39. Ibid., 124.

40. "Internal Iconicity in Paṛaiyuar 'Crying Songs'", 334.

41. Joyce B. Flueckiger, "Caste and Regional Variants in Oral Epic Traditions", in Stuart H. Blackburn, Peter J. Claus, Joyce B. Flueckiger, and Susan S. Wadley, eds., *Oral Epics in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 33–54.

42. See collected studies in Dan Ben-Amos, ed., *Folklore Genres* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1976). Ben-Amos argues that "the forms of oral tradition . . . are not merely analytical constructs . . . but [that] they are distinct modes of communication which exist in the lore of peoples" (ibid., xxxi).

43. Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein, *Folklore, Performance and Communica-*

tion (The Hague, 1975); Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1977).

44. "Performing History: The Importance of Occasions", *Rethinking History* 9, no. 1 (2005): 35.

45. Ibid., 40–41. On emotion, see Catherine A. Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod, eds., *Language and the Politics of Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); on gender performance, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Arabic poetry and songs have also been intensively studied with regard to the tribal politics of the region and notions of struggle and honour; see Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 28–29.

46. *Outline of a Theory of Practice,* trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977; 2005), 79.

47. Judith Butler argues that one's gender identity is constituted by the 'performativity' of repeated actions within a regulatory frame; see *Gender Trouble,* 24–25. This is a useful notion to apply to bridal laments, which take a lengthy period to master and are then performed over a period of days at a time when the young woman is undergoing a major transition in her life situation. As all scholars of Chinese lament traditions have noted, bridal laments play an important role in transforming the daughter into a wife.

48. In calling for folk performance studies to take into account social and cultural history, Arjun Appadurai notes that folk materials can show "not cultural consensus but debate, on central matters of power, of status, of gender"; Appadurai et al., *Gender, Genre and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions,* 471.

49. For a study of Nanhui funeral laments, see Anne E. McLaren, "Making Heaven Weep: Funeral Laments in Chinese Culture", *Journal of the Oriental Studies Association of Australia,* forthcoming.

50. Folklore scholars in China distinguish between laments performed by people deemed to be Han Chinese and those by people deemed to belong to 'minority nationalities'. However, the entire history of China is one of the accommodation between multi-ethnic communities over the generations to form the distinctive regional cultures one finds today. For example, there are manifold parallels between the lament traditions of the 'minority' Tujia people of the upper Yangzi and the 'Han Chinese' of the lower Yangzi regions, as I will discuss in Chapter 5. Erik Mueggler has studied the laments of the Yi people of Yunnan and the way these imagistically reflect the production of hemp, "The Poetics of Grief and the Price of Hemp in Southwest China", *JAS* 57, no. 4 (November 1998): 979–1008. In another study he pointedly critiques the notion of a central Chinese culture belonging to Han Chinese alone; see Mueggler, *The Age of Wild Ghosts: Memory, Violence and Place in Southwest China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 18–21.

51. The Tujia people have been given the status of 'minority' in the People's Republic. However, many identify as Han Chinese; see Melissa J. Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese? The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 166–210. Ethnomusicologist Ruth Yee (Yu Yongyu) has studied the musical and other aspects of Tujia laments; see her *Tujia zu kujia ge zhi yinyue tezheng yu shehui hanyi* (Wuhan: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 2002).

52. See Fred Blake's studies of laments by Hakka women in Sai Kung, Hong Kong New Territories, "Death and Abuse in Marriage Laments: The Curse of Chinese Brides", *Asian Folklore Studies* 37, no. 1 (1978): 13–33, and "The Feelings of Chinese Daughters towards Their Mothers as Revealed in Marriage Laments", *Folklore* 90, no. 1 (1979): 91–97; Elizabeth Johnson's study of the funeral laments of Hakka women from Kwan Mun Hau in Hong Kong New Territories, "Grieving for the Dead, Grieving for the Living: Funeral Laments of Hakka Women", in James L.Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds., *Death Ritual in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988): 135–163, and "Singing of Separation, Lamenting Loss: Hakka Women's Expressions of Separation and Reunion", in Charles Stafford, ed., *Living with Separation in China: Anthropological Accounts* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 27–52; Rubie Watson's study of laments collected and transcribed by Chang Cheng-p'ing (also known as Cheung Ching-ping) in the Yuen Long area of Hong Kong, "Chinese Bridal Laments: The Claims of a Dutiful Daughter", in Bell Yung, Evelyn S. Rawski, and Rubie S. Watson, eds., *Harmony* and *Counterpoint: Ritual Music in the Chinese Context* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 107–129. Eugene Anderson includes one lamentation-type song in his translations of "Talking Songs" of Hong Kong boat women, "Songs of the Hong Kong Boat People", *Chinoperl News* 5 (1973): 8–114. Ho Yuk-ying has recently completed a study of bridal laments based on Cheung's transcripted laments and her own observations, "Bridal Laments in Rural Hong Kong: Chinese Women Social Aspects", *Asian Folklore Studies* 64, no. 1 (April 2005): 53–88.

53. Tan Daxian, *Zhongguo hunjia yishi geyao yanjiu* (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1990).

54. Nanhui laments are collected in Ren Jiahe, *Hunsang yishi ge* (Shanghai: Zhongguo minjian wenyi chubanshe, 1989), and Ren Jiahe et al., *Ku sang ge* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1989). Sample laments are also included in *Pudong lao xianhua,* 330–334.

55. Ba Jin, *Jia* (Hong Kong: Nanguo chubanshe [1st publ. c. 1931], 1957), 399.

56. Zhou Libo, *Shan namian renjia* (Changsha: Hunan Renmin chubanshe, 1979), 52.

57. This is a rare example of men as well as women reported as performers of marriage laments. In some communities mourners *(daiku)* could be hired to perform bridal and wedding laments. Hired mourners were known in the Shanghai district and environs in the twentieth century; see Tan, *Zhongguo hunjia,* 105.

58. Chang-tai Hung mentions *ku jia* briefly in his study of this important folklore movement but does not cite any studies of this era; *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 74. See also his section on songs about the suffering of women (ibid., 69–72). Tan Daxian notes the lack of systematic studies of laments during this period (*Zhongguo hunjia,* 104). Hu Pu'an included a few examples in his 1930s compendium of wedding customs, *Zhonghua quanguo fengsu zhi* (Taipei: Qixin shuju, 1968), and there are some scattered studies in the periodical *Geyao zhoukan.*

59. Johnson, "Singing of Separation, Lamenting Loss", 28; Watson, "Chinese Bridal Laments", 108.

60. In this regard my study is similar to other studies of women's laments in China conducted by Western anthropologists such as Blake, Watson, and Ho who rely on transcriptions. In some cases these were written down by newly literate women in the early

1970s (Blake) and in other cases compiled by a local folklore aficionado from actual or elicited performances (Watson and Ho, both relying on the earlier work of Cheung Ching-ping). Johnson's material was elicited from an elderly practitioner at Kwan Mun Hau, Hong Kong New Territories, called Yao Chan Shek-ying; see her "Singing of Separation, Lamenting Loss".

61. *Zhongguo hunjia,* 121.

62. *Wu Yue minjian xinyang minsu* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1992), 240–241.

63. "Death and Abuse in Marriage Laments, 17.

64. "Grieving for the Dead, Grieving for the Living", 157–159.

65. Ibid., 160.

66. "Singing of Separation, Lamenting Loss", 30.

67. "Chinese Bridal Laments", 107.

68. Ibid., 126.

69. Ibid., 129. Yuk-ying Ho, in her recent study of the Cheung's transcribed lament material, argues similarly that bridal laments sought to inculcate obedience in the brides while allowing them to give "public voice to their own personal tensions and suffering"; "Bridal Laments in Rural Hong Kong", 56.

70. The bridal laments collected by Cheung Ching-ping and investigated by Rubie S. Watson and Yuk-ying Ho, for example, comprise some 500 lines gathered in the 1960s from numerous women over several years. The Nanhui laments comprise the most extensive corpus currently available in transcription. The transcribed bridal lament cycle of Pan Cailian consists of around 1,500 lines.

71. "Death and Abuse in Marriage Laments", 13.

72. "Songs of the Hong Kong Boat People", 19–20.

73. "Shi'a Women's Rituals in Northwest Pakistan: The Shortcomings and Significance of Resistance", *Anthropological Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 411.

74. "Courting Krishna on the Banks of the Ganges: Gender and Power in a Hindu Women's Ritual Tradition", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 1 (2004): 26.

75. Mary Hancock, *Womanhood in the Making: Domestic Ritual and Public Culture in Urban South India* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 19–20.

76. Von Glahn, in *Sinister Way,* occasionally touches on women's use of sorcery. One example is palace women engaging in "spells and curses" (see 3–4). For women's use of incantation in healing in the lower Yangzi delta region, see Jiang Bin, *Wu Yue minjian xingyang minsu,* 86–87.

77. Ren, *Hunsang yishi ge.*

78. Private interviews with Chen and Jiang, August 1994.

Chapter 1: Imagining Jiangnan

1. *Nanhui xian wenhua zhi,* compiled and published by Nanhui xian wenhua zhi weiyuanhui. Closed circulation; chief ed. Xi Guorong, postface by "The Editor" dated December 1993 (publ. 1993/1994?), 221.

2. Mark Elvin, *Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 167–215.

3. Ibid., 207. Philip C. C. Huang, too, notes the paradox of poor subsistence farming communities together with high levels of commercialization, based mainly on low-paid female labour in household textiles; *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangtze Delta, 1350–1988* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 5, 16, passim.

4. See Robert Brenner and Christopher Isett, "England's Divergence from China's Yangzi Delta: Property Relations, Microeconomics, and Patterns of Development", *JAS* 61, no. 2 (2002): 620.

5. For this categorization, see Jiang Bin, ed., *Jiangnan shi da minjian xushi shi—Wuge ji* (Shanghai: Wenyi chubanshe, 1989), 1–2.

6. Antoinet Schimmelpenninck, "Chinese Folk Singers in Jiangsu Province (1)", *Chime Journal,* no. 8 (Spring 1995): 48.

7. Ren, *Hunsang yishi ge,* 152; Jiang, *Jiangnan shi da minjian xushi shi—Wuge ji,* 1.

8. For a study of how songs reflect a gendered environment in China, see Antonia Finnane, "Water, Love, and Labor-Aspects of a Gendered Environment", in Mark Elvin and Liu Ts'ui-jung, eds., *Sediments of Time: Environment and Society in Chinese History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 657–690.

9. *Wisdom Sits in Places* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 7.

10. For photos, see *Pudong lao jingtou,* 48, 55.

11. For a photo, see Qian Minquan, *Shanghai xiangcun minsu yongpin jicui* (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2000), 48, 49.

12. Robert L. Chard, "Rituals and Scriptures of the Stove Cult", in David Johnson, ed., *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion: Five Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 13–15; Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), 109–113.

13. For a photo of a *chandao,* see Qian, *Shanghai xiangcun,* 50.

14. For photos of the oil and gasoline lamp, see *Pudong lao jingtou,* 132–133.

15. For a nuanced study of gender segregation, home architecture, and its relationship to neo-Confucian orthodoxy, see Bray, *Technology and Gender,* pt. 1, 49–172.

16. For a photo, see *Pudong lao jingtou,* 45.

17. Ibid., 137–138, 141–142.

18. Ibid., 148–149. For the stomacher, see ibid., 143.

19. A mixture of rice and ground barley; see Creamer, ed., *A Chinese-English Dictionary of the Wu Dialect* (Kensington, MD: Dunwoody Press, 1991), 62.

20. *Pudong lao jingtou,* 166, has a photo of the spherical rice dumplings served on the fifteenth day of the New Year.

21. *Nanhui xian zhi* (mod. ed.), Xue Zhendong ed. (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1992), 113–114, 117.

22. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, eds., *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996).

23. For a map of the water routes in Nanhui, see Zhou Zhenhe, ed., *Shangha lishi ditu ji* (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1999), 23.

24. For a photo of a pair of scales, see Qian, *Shanghai xiangcun,* 72.

25. *Shanghai lishi ditu ji,* 94.

26. On the role of the *baozheng,* see Huang, *Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangtze Delta,* 155.

27. One finds awareness of the role of the emperor even in remote Chinese communities. According to David Faure, it was "the imperial presence, real or imagined, that made the village an integral and self-respecting part of the empire"; "The Emperor in the Village: Representing the State in South China", in Joseph P. McDermott, ed., *State and Court Ritual in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 298.

28. Li Xuechang, 20 *Shiji Nanhui nongcun shehui bianqian* (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2001), 12–13.

Chapter 2: The People of the Sands

1. "Lan nü zi you lan lang pei, mei you lan nü shang hui dui".

2. Li, *Ershi Shiji Nanhui nongcun shehui bianqian,* 3.

3. Huang, *The Peasant Family and Rural Development in the Yangtze Delta,* 28.

4. Lin Tuo and Zhang Xiugui, "Shanghai Nanhui diqu huanjing bianqian yu jingji kaifa ji qi zhengqu yanbian de xiangguan yanjiu", *Dili kexue* 21, no. 6 (2001): 531–536.

5. *Nanhui xianzhi,* contemporary edition, ed. Xue Zhendong (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1992), 112.

6. Lin and Zhang, "Shanghai Nanhui," 532–533.

7. Li, *Ershi shiji Nanhui,* 4.

8. Ibid., 113.

9. *Nanhui xian zhi,* comp. Zhang Wenhu, reprint (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe [1879], 1970), 20:2a, 1433–3a, 1435.

10. Ibid., 20:2b, 1433.

11. The gazetteer lists the following years when the price of grain rose to unacceptable levels: 1823, 1833, 1849, 1862; see *Nanhui xian zhi* (1879) 20:2b, 1434.

12. Li, *Ershi shiji Nanhui,* 115–116.

13. Ibid., 346. One *li* is equivalent to 0.5 of a kilometre.

14. Kathryn Bernhardt, *Rents, Taxes, and Peasant Resistance: The Lower Yangtze Region, 1840–1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1992), 132–133.

15. Ibid., 254, table C.8.

16. Li, *Ershi shiji Nanhui,* 289.

17. Ibid., 323.

18. The *baozhang* (Security Group Leader) was the head of a unit of administration governing a certain number of households. He was also known as the *baozheng.*

19. Li, *Ershi shiji Nanhui,* 323–324.

20. *Nanhui xian zhi* (1879), 20:4b, 1438.

21. Ibid., 20:5a, 1439.

22. Ibid., 20:6b, 1442

23. Li, *Ershi shiji Nanhui,* 83–84.

24. *Nanhui xian zhi* (1879), 20:6a/1441.

25. Ibid., 20:1a, 1431.

26. *Nanhui xian xuzhi,* juan 18, Fengsu zhi (Customs), 857.

27. Li, *Ershi shiji Nanhui,* 359.

28. Ibid., 499. A *dan* is equivalent to approximately 50 kilograms of dry grain.

29. Bernhardt, *Rents, Taxes, and Peasant Resistance,* 147.

30. Li, *Ershi shihi Nanhui,* 75.

31. *Nanhui xianzhi* (1992 ed.), 112.

32. Zhou and You delineate four northern dialect groups and four southern groups within the Wu dialect region during the Ming and Qing dynasties; Zhou Zhenhe and You Rujie, *Fangyan yu Zhongguo wenhua* (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1986), 107; map in Appendix 4–6. The linguistic group to which the Nanhui region belonged is called here S (south) 1.

33. Emily Honig, "Native-Place Hierarchy and Labor Market Segmentation: The Case of Subei People in Shanghai", in Thomas G. Rawski and Lillian M. Li, eds., *Chinese History in Economic Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 272–295; Antonia Finnane, "The Origins of Prejudice: The Malintegration of Subei in Late Imperial China", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, no. 2 (April 1993): 211–238.

34. *Nanhui xianzhi* (1992 ed.), 112.

35. *Nanhui xian xuzhi,* Fengsu zhi, 862.

36. Ibid., 857.

37. See the maps of Nanhui in 1863 and 1916, *Shanghai lishi dituji,* 24 and 35.

38. *Nanhui xian zhi* (1992 ed.), 105.

39. Bernhardt provides a table of population growth in Songjiang Prefecture from 1816 to 1932 that shows a population peak in Nanhui of 701,000 in 1881, then a fall to 426,000 by 1912; *Rents, Taxes, and Peasant Resistance,* Appendix, table C.4.

40. Ibid., 86, 119, 132–133, 252.

41. This was the residence of the Xi family. See the map in the preliminary matter of the *Nanhui xian wenhua zhi,* 237.

42. Li, *Ershi shiji Nanhui,* 91–92.

43. "England's Divergence from China's Yangzi Delta", 641n38.

44. Elvin, *Retreat of the Elephants,* 207–208. In the northern borderlands, by contrast, women lived twice as long as at Jiaxing. Epidemics were far less prevalent in the north than in the more densely populated south because there was more clean water and a healthier diet; ibid. 272–274.

45. Kathryn Bernhardt, *Rents, Taxes, and Peasant Resistance,* 19.

46. Emily Martin Ahern, "Affines and Rituals of Kinship," in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), 291–292.

47. Scott Wilson, "About Face: Social Networks and Prestige Politics in Contemporary Shanghai Villages", Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1994, 347–349.

48. Yang Xiangkui (c. 1924), "Geyao zhong de gusou," in Shu Lan, ed., *Zhongguo difang geyao jicheng,* 3 Lilun yanjiu (Taipei: Bohaitang wenhua gongsi, 1989), 139.

49. *Botuo luobo dipi kuan, jia chu guniang asao huan.*

50. Ellen R. Judd, "*Niangjia:* Chinese Women and Their Natal Families", *Journal of Asian Studies* 48, no. 3 (1989): 525–544.

51. Li, *Ershi shiji Nanhui,* 198.

52. This was true for the Henggai region in the far northwest of Nanhui and normative for China generally; ibid.

53. Fengsu zhi 18:5a, 865.

54. Li, *Ershi shiji Nanhui,* 363.

55. Arthur P. Wolf and Chieh-shan Huang, *Marriage and Adoption in China, 1845–1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980), 72.

56. Li, *Ershi shiji Nanhui,* 159.

57. Ibid., 470.

58. Li Xuechang, "20 shiji Jiang Zhe Hu nongcun", 9–10. 'Minor marriage' is held to be a marginal practice in mainland China, but Wolf and Huang have demonstrated that it was the most prevalent form of marriage in certain parts of south China and Taiwan in the first half of the twentieth century; see Wolf and Huang, *Marriage and Adoption in China.*

59. Li, *Ershi shiji Nanhui,* 582.

60. Ibid., 583–584.

61. Particularly "Xue Liulang", included in Jiang Bin, *Jiangnan shi da minjian xushi shi-Wuge ji,* 339–431, and discussed by Qian Shujuan, *Jiangnan minjian xushishi ji gushi* (Shanghai: Wenyi chubanshe, 1997), 67–68.

62. Anne E. McLaren, "Marriage by Abduction in Twentieth Century China," *Modern Asian Studies* 35, no. 4 (2001): 953–984.

63. For full details, see McLaren, "Marriage by Abduction".

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., 198.

66. Strong son preference in Chinese fertility rates over the centuries is well documented. For a useful survey of recent scholarship, see Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea M. den Boer, *Bare Branches: The Security Implications of Asia's Surplus Male Population* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 138–152.

67. Scholars theorize that, due to increased affluence, more girls may have survived infancy during the High Qing period. Nonetheless, it is argued that women of marriageable age still remained in short supply and many men remained unmarried; see discussion in Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 33–34.

68. *Chinese Modernity and the Peasant Path: Semicolonialism in the Northern Yangzi Delta* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 193.

69. For the late imperial period, see Ann Waltner, "Infanticide and Dowry in Ming and Early Qing China", in Anne B. Kinney, ed., *Chinese Views of Childhood* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 193–217, and Lin Liyue, "Fengsu yu zuiyan: Mingdai de ninü jixu ji qi wenhua yihan", in Yu Chien-ming, ed., *Jindai Zhongguo de funü yu shehui (1600–1950)* (Taipei: Academia Sinica, Modern History Department, 2003), 1–24. The most common reason given for infanticide is fear of the burden of dowry payment on

marriage. Lin cites historical evidence on female infanticide and abductions for Songjiang Prefecture, which includes the modern Nanhui region; see ibid., 6 and 7.

70. *Nanhui xian zhi* (1879), 3:21b, 292. People who "wished for sons to carry on the patriline or daughters to be child-brides" would come to the orphanage and be allowed to adopt a child if judged to be of good character; ibid., 3:23b, 296.

71. Bernice J. Lee discusses attempts by various officials to stamp out the practice; see "Female Infanticide in China", in Richard W. Guisso and Stanley Johannasen, eds., *Women in China: Current Directions in Historical Scholarship* (Youngstown, NY: Philo Press, 1981), 163–171.

72. "England's Divergence from China's Yangzi Delta: Property Relations, Microeconomics, and Patterns of Development", *JAS* 61, no. 2 (2002): 641.

73. On the shortage of women, the high price of dowries, and the prevalence of marriage by abduction in Chuansha, a region bordering on Nanhui, see Ding Shiliang, *Zhongguo difang zhi minsu ziliao huibian—Huadong zhuan,* 2nd ed. (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chubanshe, 1997), 2:23. On the common practice of infanticide in Zhengli, a region of Shanghai, see ibid., 50: "When the poor give birth to too many girls, they weary of this and simply drown them. They do this to such an extent that it is very difficult to find a wife and pay for a bride. There are cases in this area where a widow who wishes to remain faithful to her deceased husband is inveigled into remarrying even to the point where she is seized and forcibly married off." For infanticide in Jiading County, to the west of Shanghai, see ibid., 56: "When the poor have too many children, they drown them at birth. Although there are orphanages to take infants they still carry out the practice of drowning them."

74. *Peasant Life in China: A Field Study of Country Life in the Yangtze Valley* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1939; repr. 1980), 33.

75. Ibid., 36.

76. Li, *Ershi shiji Nanhui,* 359.

77. Ibid.

78. I was introduced by the paternal nephew.

79. Historically, it was often the midwife who performed the deed; Lin, "Fengsu yu zuiyan", 14. The agonizing decision made by one mother to smother a boy baby at a time of great hardship is portrayed vividly in one episode in the Long Bow Village film trilogy produced by Carmen Hinton (see "Small Happiness").

80. Nanhui saying: "Ren yao lian pi, shu yao shu pi."

Chapter 3: The Hollow Cotton Spool

1. Bray, *Technology and Gender,* 215.

2. On the formation of the cotton industry in the lower Yangzi basin, see Nishijima Sadao, "The Formation of the Early Chinese Cotton Industry", in Linda Grove and Christian Daniels, eds., *State and Society in China: Japanese Perspectives on Ming-Qing Social and Economic History* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1984), 17–77; also Huang, *The Peasant Family and Rural Development,* 45–56, and Bernhardt, *Rents, Taxes, and Peasant Resistance,* 17–19.

3. Nishijima, "Formation of the Early Chinese Cotton Industry", 34.

4. Ibid., 28, 59–60.

5. For this reason Philip Huang has described the economic development of the region as 'involutionary' rather than capitalist in nature (*The Peasant Family and Rural Development,* 88 and passim), a view that has been challenged by Kenneth Pomeranz, "Beyond the East–West Binary: Resituating Development Paths in the Eighteenth Century World", *JAS* 61, no. 2 (2002): 539–590. Brenner and Isett arrive at a conclusion closer to Huang's 'involutionary' perspective—namely, that in the delta region by 1800 "additional labor inputs could no longer yield additional agricultural outputs". They note also that "the ecological decay" caused inappropriate crop use in marginal lands, a drop in life expectancy, a marked drop in the grain-purchasing power, and conflicts between landlords and tenants; "England's Divergence from China's Yangzi Delta", 639.

6. Kang Chao, *The Development of Cotton Textile Production in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, East Asia Center Publications, 1977), 33–34.

7. Ibid., 36–38.

8. Ibid., 47.

9. Nishijima, "Formation of the Early Chinese Cotton Industry", 33.

10. Ibid., 55, 59–60.

11. Huang, *The Peasant Family and Rural Development,* 52, 55.

12. Ibid., 52–53.

13. *Nanhui xian zhi* (1879), 20:3a, 1435.

14. Ibid., 20:2b, 1433.

15. Ibid., 20:3a, 1435.

16. Qian Minquan, *Shanghai xiangcun,* 45.

17. *Zuo mao shi.* The *mao* period was 5:00–7:00 a.m.

18. Fengsu zhi, 858–859.

19. Ibid., 859.

20. Li, *Ershi shiji Nanhui,* 324. One *jin* was roughly equivalent to 0.5 kilogram.

21. Ibid., 382. A *mao* was worth ten cents.

22. *Nanhui xian zhi* (1879 ed.), 1437.

23. Also noted briefly by Jiang Bin, who adds that for this reason they were able to share in the labour of treading the waterwheel used for irrigation; see *Daozuo wenhua yu Jiangnan minsu* (Shanghai: Wenyi chubanshe, 1996), 92. This is further confirmed by Gu Bingquan, who observed that the women east of the Huangpu (i.e., Pudong) did not bind their feet; *Shanghai fengsu guji kao* (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue, 1993), 252.

24. Fengsuzhi, 866.

25. Li, *Ershi shiji Nanhui,* 359.

26. Dorothy Ko, citing an eighteenth-century commentator, observes that rural women outside Suzhou worked in the fields and did not bind their feet; *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 131–132, see also 20. She notes this was an exception to the "normative practice" of foot binding for Han Chinese women.

27. On the scorn accorded women with natural feet, see C. Fred Blake, "Foot-binding

in Neo-Confucian China and the Appropriation of Female Labor", *Signs* 19, no. 3 (1994): 692–693.

28. Hill Gates, "On a New Footing: Footbinding and the Coming of Modernity", *Jindai Zhongguo funü shi yanjiu,* no. 5 (August 1997): 126; Gates, "Footloose in Fujian: Economic Correlates of Footbinding", *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History* 43, no. 1 (2001): 146. On perceptions of status and foot binding, see also Ko, *Cinderella's Sister,* 182–186.

29. *Zhongguo gequ jicheng,* Jiangsu juan, 329. A local saying had it that "One pair of small feet fills a vat with tears" *(xiaojiao yishuang, yanlei yigang), Pudong lao xianhua,* 251.

30. *Nanhui xianzhi* (1879), 20:3b, 1436.

31. Fengsu zhi, 861.

32. Ibid., 862–863.

33. Li, *Ershi shiji Nanhui,* 447–448.

34. A *chi* is approximately one-third of a metre (ibid., 448).

35. *Chinese Modernity and the Peasant Path: Semicolonialism in the Northern Yangzi Delta* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

36. Ibid., 51.

37. "For Better, For Worse: Women and the World Market in Rural China", *Modern China* 20, no. 2 (April 1994): 185.

38. "Footloose in Fujian", 131.

39. Nanhui saying: *hua hao dao hao, niang hao, nan hao.*

40. Hill Gates, "On a New Footing", 124.

Chapter 4: Seizing a Slice of Heaven

1. In modern times the Wu dialect region covers Jiangsu Province with the exception of Nanjing, Chongming Island, and most of Zhejiang Province. There is considerable regional variation within this area; see Jerry Norman, *Chinese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 199–204. On Wu folk songs, see Schimmelpenninck, "Chinese Folk Singers in Jiangsu Province (1)". Another example of an oral art from the Yangzi delta area is Yangzhou storytelling; see Vibeke Børdahl, *The Oral Tradition of Yangzhou Storytelling* (Richmond, VA: Curzon Press, 1996), and Vibeke Børdahl and Jette Ross, *Chinese Storytellers: Life and Art in the Yangzhou Tradition* (Boston: Cheng and Tsui, 2002).

2. Dong Sen and Yang Huilin, eds., *Wuge* (Shanghai: Zhongguo minjian wenyi chubanshe, 1984), 27–29, 223–226.

3. In his study of the bridal laments of Sai Kung, Hong Kong New Territories, in the early 1970s, C. Fred Blake notes that the daughter's appeals to the mother "include tender devotions and regrets, but also remonstrations aimed at arousing [her] mother's maternal instincts" ("The Feelings of Chinese Daughters towards their Mothers", 91). His study does not include the mother's response. Perhaps this was not a part of the repertoire in that region.

4. In the early twentieth century, some women felt angry at the "lack of personal support and affection" they received from their mothers; see Elisabeth Croll, *Changing Identi-*

ties of Chinese Women: Rhetoric, Experience and Self-perception in Twentieth-century China (London and New Jersey: Hong Kong University Press and Zed Books, 1995), 57, and her section on mothers and daughters (ibid. 56–59).

5. *Mengzi wenfa duben,* 3:25a, (Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 61; D. C. Lau, trans., *Mencius* III: B.2 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), 107.

6. See discussion on the *Book of Rites,* "The Meaning of Weddings," in Christian De Pee, "The Ritual and Sexual Bodies of the Groom and the Bride in Ritual Manuals of the Sung Dynasty (Eleventh through Thirteenth Century)", in Harriet T. Zurndorfer, ed., *Chinese Women in the Imperial Past: New Perspectives* (Leiden, Boston, Cologne: Brill, 1999), 61. In a slightly different reading of the same text, Susan Mann notes that this "deferential wife" is accorded authority and responsibilities complementary to those of her husband; see her "Grooming a Daughter for Marriage: Brides and Wives in the Mid-Ch'ing Period", in Rubie S. Watson and Patricia B. Ebrey, eds., *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 209.

7. Wu Zimu (mid-thirteenth century), in his account of Hangzhou in the period 1241 to 1274, refers to a female relative with a surviving husband *(fufu shuangquan zhe)* who assists the bride's family with the trousseau; *Mengliang lu,* in Meng Yuanlao et al., comps. *Dongjing Menghualu (wai si zhong)* (Taibei: Guting shuwu faxing; reprint of Shanghai Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1956 ed.), juan 20, 304. This custom is known in many parts of China; see Zhang Honglai, *Hunsang li zashuo* (Beijing: Wenhua xueshe, 1928).

8. This depiction of stages of the marriage process in Nanhui Pudong is from Nanhui informants and studies such as Li Zhongxing, "Shanghai Pudong diqu hunsu chutan", *Minsu yanjiu,* no. 32 (1994): 47–48, and Ren, *Hunsang yishi ge* and *Nanhui wenhua xian zhi,* 293–294.

9. For photos of both, see *Pudong lao jingtou,* 131.

10. For a photo of fine candle holders from Nanhui, see Qian, *Shanghai xiangcun,* 69.

11. For photos, see ibid., 75, 77.

12. For example, women are goods on which you take a loss *(pei qian huo),* women are the root of evil, footstools who must be married off, and so on, in *Zhongguo geyao jicheng [ZGJ]: Jiangsu juan* (Beijing: Zhongguo ISBN zhongxin, 1998), song from Taixing County, 334.

13. "The Commoditization of Chinese Women", 799.

14. By the late imperial period, women did occasionally compose poems that protested gender inequality. For an example see Maureen Robertson's discussion of a late eighteenth-century woman poet, Wang Caiwei, in "Changing the Subject: Gender and Self-Inscription in Authors' Prefaces and *Shi* Poetry", in Ellen Widmer and Kang-I Sun Chang, eds., *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 216.

15. Rubie S. Watson, "Class Differences and Affinal Relations in South China", *Man* 16, no. 4 (1981): 593–615; Bernard and Rita Gallin, "Matrilateral and Affinal Relationships in Changing Chinese Society", in Hsieh Jih-chang and Chuang Ying-chang, eds., *The Chinese Family and Its Ritual Behavior* (Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, Academica Sinica, 1992), 101–116; Ellen R. Judd, "*Niangjia:* Chinese Women and Their Natal Families", *Journal of Asian Studies* 48, no. 3 (1989): 544, and her *Gender and Power in Rural North China* (Stan-

ford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); Beverly Bossler, "'A Daughter Is a Daughter All Her Life': Affinal Relations and Women's Networks in Song and Late Imperial China", *Late Imperial China* 21, no. 1 (June 2000): 77–106.

16. Bossler, "'A Daughter Is a Daughter All Her Life'", 99.

Chapter 5: Weeping and Wailing in Chinese History

1. See Christian de Pee on the influence of this Marxist paradigm in modern Chinese scholarship, "Premodern Chinese Weddings and the Divorce of Past and Present", *positions* 9, no. 3 (2001): 559–584.

2. These ideas are associated with the work of Lewis Henry Morgan, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1877), incorporated into the analysis of Friedrich Engels and adopted in Marxist historical paradigms.

3. *Qianghun* (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 2000), 154.

4. Book of Changes, Chun "Difficulty at the Beginning" 6-2, 6-6, translated into German by Richard Wilhelm, *The I Ching.* Translated into English by Cary F. Baynes, 3rd ed., reprint (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 18.

5. Liang Qichao (1873–1929) was amongst the first to argue for the relationship between marriage by abduction and bridal laments; see McLaren, "Marriage by Abduction in Twentieth Century China", *Modern Asian Studies* 35, no. 4 (2001): 971–972. Chen Guyuan believed that China underwent a stage of marriage by abduction; *Zhongguo hunyin shi,* reprint (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1998; 1st printed 1936). In the contemporary period these views have been echoed by virtually every scholar of Chinese marriage. Examples include Sheng Yi, *Zhongguo hunsu wenhua* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1994), 144–148; Guo Xingwen, *Zhongguo chuantong hunyin fengsu* (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1994), 240. Wang Qingshu, *Zhongguo chuantong xisu zhong de xingbie qishi* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1995), 91–92; Dong Jiazun, *Zhongguo gudai hunyinshi yanjiu* (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1995), 219, and Ye and Wu, *Qianghun,* 123–124, 151–155.

6. Norman Kutcher, *Mourning in Late Imperial China: Filial Piety and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 32.

7. *Li ji Zheng zhu,* vol. 1, Sang da ji, 13:2a, in *Sibu beiyao* series, vol. 7 (Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1965); James Legge, trans., *Li Chi Book of Rites,* The Sacred Books of the East, vol. 27 (1st publ. Clarendon Press, 1885; repr. Motilal Banarsidass, 1966), vol. 2, bk. XIX, sect 1:5, p. 175.

8. *Liji Zheng zhu,* Tangong xia, 3:16a, in *Sibu beiyao,* vol. 7; trans. Christoph Harbsmeier, "Weeping and Wailing in Ancient China", in Halvor Eifring, ed., *Minds and Mentalities in Traditional Chinese Literature* (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 1999), 322–323.

9. *Mengzi wenfa duben,* 6:16a, p. 129; Lau, *Mencius* VI:B.6, p. 175; this translation by Harbsmeier, "Weeping and Wailing", 337.

10. *Hanshi waizhuan,* 1:19 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 18; cited in Harbsmeier, "Weeping and Wailing", 340–342.

11. Harbsmeier,"Weeping and Wailing", 317–318.

12. Ibid., p. 317 and passim. Harbsmeier surveyed the usage of *ku* and *qi* in all extant pre-Qin period texts. His focus was on the meaning of *ku,* not the gendered nature of these performances. In this section I have taken advantage of his listing of primary sources to examine the instances of women's performances of *ku.*

13. *Zuozhuan quan yi,* ed., Wang Shoulian (Guizhou: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1990), 1436–1437; trans. Burton Watson, *The Tso Chuan: Selections from China's Oldest Narrative History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 186–187.

14. Chen Kuo-tung, trans. James Greenbaum, "Temple Lamentation and Robe-burning-Gestures of Social Protest in Seventeenth-century China", *East Asian History* 15/16 (June/December 1998), 33–78.

15. Ibid., 48.

16. Ibid., 43.

17. *Zuozhuan quan yi,* 467–468.

18. *Guoyu,* 8:3b, Zuoqiu Ming, ed., in *Sibu beiyao,* vol. 282 (Taibei: Taiwan Zhonghua shuju, 1965); cited in Harbsmeier, "Weeping and Wailing", 367–368.

19. *Mencius* III: A.2, trans. D. C. Lau, *Mencius,* 97; *Mengzi wenfa duben,* 3:3a, 49.

20. *Han Feizi jijie,* Nansan 38:6 (Guoxue jiben congshu jianbian, Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1933); cited in Harbsmeier, "Weeping and Wailing", 372–373.

21. *Liji Zheng zhu,* Tangong shang, 2:15b, in *Sibu beiyao,* vol. 7; cited in Harbsmeier, "Weeping and Wailing", 376.

22. *Liezi yizhu,* ed., Yan Beiming and Yan Jie (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1986), 127–128.

23. This anecdote appears in the commentary by Pei Songzhi (372–451); see Chen Shou, *Sanguozhi,* 5 vols. (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1st printed 1959; repr. 1973), vol. 5. It was included in *The Filial Piety Classic (Xiaojing)* and influenced generations of children.

24. Ren Fang (459–508), *Shu yi ji,* excerpted in Jiang Shejing, ed., *Lidai xiaoshuo biji xuan,* 6 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1983), 1:166.

25. *Hanshu,* 8: 4188n4, cited in Harbsmeier, "Weeping and Wailing", 324.

26. The story of Meng Jiangnü is believed to derive from the story of wife Qi, whose laments were praised by Mencius for changing the customs of the state, as previously noted.

27. *Lienüzhuan,* vol. 1, juan 1:50b-51b, facs. Ming ed. (Beijing: Zhongguo shuju, 1991).

28. For the development of the Meng Jiangnü story, see Yang Zhenliang, *Mengjiangnü yanjiu* (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1985), 2–8.

29. Wang Zhaoqian, *Anhui Guichi nuoxi juben xuan* (Taipei: She He Zheng jijinhui, 1995), 527.

30. "Weeping at the ancestral temple" tells the story of Liu Chen, heir to the second Shu emperor, who kills his sons, severs his wife's head, and then cuts his own throat in protest at the emperor's capitulation to the forces of Wei. Before his death he wails out a lengthy lament to his ancestors in the temple. This story is narrated in Chapter 118 of the Ming novel *Sanguo yanyi.* In "Weeping for Li Cunxiao" (Ku Cunxiao) Li Cunxiao's wife carries

out a wailed lament to protest the gruesome execution of her husband. In "The Marks of Cinnabar" ("Zhu hen ji", a Yuan *zaju* play composed by Guan Hanqing, c. 1220–c. 1300), the wailing mode *(kudiao)* is used a number of times. The wife wails when begging for food to feed her starving mother-in-law, and the son wails at what he believes to be the graves of his mother and wife. The act of wailing leads directly to the reunion of the family.

31. *Zhuangzi jiaozhu* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1981; repr. 1999), vol. 1, chap. 2 , 87; discussed in Harbsmeier, "Weeping and Wailing", 404.

32. Zhou Qufei, *Ling wai dai da,* facsimile reproduced in *Biji xiaoshuo daguan,* vol. 3, ce 7, juan 4:a/b, 327; cited in Tan (1990:98–99). For a German translation, see Almut Netolitzky, trans., *Das Ling-wai Tai-ta von Chou Ch'u-fei: eine Landeskunde Südchinas aus dem 12.Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1977), 4.9.

33. Tan, *Zhongguo hunjia,* 99.

34. Ibid., 99.

35. *Ling wai dai da, xu* [preface], 310.

36. In Dai Zhaochen (c. 1870), *Guangzhou fuzhi* (1879 ed.) (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1966), juan 15:3, yudi lüe qi-fengsu, 271; cited in Tan, *Zhongguo hunjia,* 100.

37. *Guangdong xinyu,* juan 12:14a-b; cited in Tan, *Zhongguo hunjia,* 100.

38. *Guangdong tongzhi,* reprint of 1864 ed.) (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1968), vol. 3, juan 92:7b-8a, 1602; cited in Tan, *Zhongguo hunjia,* 100.

39. *Ningjiang fuzhi, juan* 3 *guangxu* era (1875–1908); cited Tan, *Zhongguo hunjia,* 101.

40. Cited in Tan, *Zhongguo hunjia,* 100–101.

41. Cited in Sha Yuan, "Lun kujia xisu yu 'kujiage' de fengsu wenhua benzhi", *Guizhou minzu yanjiu* 82, no. 2 (2000): 89.

42. Feng Menglong, *Xiaofu,* reprint (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1993) juan 9:2b, 278.

43. Cheng Qiang, "Hunqian jiaoyu yu kujia fengsu", *Minjian wenhua* 5 (2000): 68–70.

44. Feng, *Xiaofu,* 278.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., 279.

47. Translated by H. C. Chang as "The Shrew", in his *Chinese Literature: Popular Fiction and Drama* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1973).

48. It appears in the compilations of tales by a man of letters, Hong Bian (fl. mid-sixteenth century), and is published in the anthology known today as *Qingpingshantang huaben;* mod. ed. by Tan Zhengbi, ed. (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe 1957), 52–67.

49. Trans. H. C. Chang, in *Chinese Literature,* 37.

50. The author has put into the mouth of Cuilian a type of comic patter belonging to a form of folk art known as "rapid speech" *(shunkouliu);* see André Lévy, *Inventaire analytique et critique du conte chinois en langue vulgaire,* pt. 1, vol. 1 (Collège de France Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1978), 1:37. See discussion by Patrick Hanan, who calls this a "chantefable" type of short story in *The Chinese Short Story: Studies in Dating, Authorship, and Composition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 140–141.

51. Hong's family came from Hangzhou in Zhejiang Province. For discussion of Hong's

background, see Wilt Idema, *Chinese Vernacular Fiction: The Formative Period* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), xxviii; and Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 56.

52. For surveys of bridal laments, see Jiang Bin, "'Kujia ge' he gudai de hunyin xisu", *Minjian wenyi jikan* 2 (1982): 17–39; reprinted in Tian Ying [pen name of Jiang Bin], *Lun Wu ge ji qita* (Shanghai: Wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 118–140; Tan, *Zhongguo hunjia,* 93–97; Pan Dan, "Kujia xisu tanwei", *Wenzhou shifan xueyuan xuebao* 24, no. 6 (December 2003): 30–34. For studies on regional traditions, see the following: for Sichuan, see Huang Zhong, "Kujia" *Minjian wenxue* (February 1957): 47–49; Shu Juan, "Chuan Xi bianqu jianü ge", *Minjian wenxue* (October 1958): 62–65; Kuang Tianqi, "Sichuan Hanzu minjian hunli yu hunjia ge (xu er)", *Minzu minjian yinyue* 2 (1995): 34–45; for Jiangyong County, Hunan, see Xie Zhimin, *Jiangyong 'Nüshu' zhi mi,* 3 vols. (Henan: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), 3:1884–1885, and Liu Fei-wen, "Women Who De-Silence Themselves", 272–296, 399–401, 411–417; for Hong Kong New Territories women and Shanghai-Nanhui women, see the studies listed in the Introduction. A further study by Tan Daxian, *Lun Gang Ao Tai minjian wenxue* (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 2003), contains more of his published work on laments in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

53. Li Zhenxi, "San geng tian qu xifu, xifu kuniang jia fu", *Shanxi keji bao,* 10 October 2000, 8, has a rare and very brief report on bridal laments in Shanxi. The multi-volume compendium of folk songs collected in recent years, the *Zhongguo geyao jicheng,* contains few bridal laments from northern provinces compared with other regions of China.

54. Tan, *Zhongguo hunji.* For the Tujia laments of Hubei and Hunan, see Yee, "Tujiazu kujia ge yu qita" and *Tujia zu kujia ge zhi yinyue;* for Tujia laments in unspecified regions, see Sha Yuan, "Lun kujia xisu", 88–90; for Yao laments in Hunan, see Xiduo, "You qu de Yaojia hunsu", *Zhongguo yiyaobao,* 13 August, 2000, 4; for the Qinghai Muslim Salar minority, see the detailed study of Ma Wei, Ma Jianzhong, and Kevin Stuart, "The Xunhua Salar Wedding", *Asian Folklore Studies* 58 (1999): 31–76; for the Qiang people of Sichuan, see Luo Tong, *Sichuan funü shehui diwei diaocha* (Beijing: Zhongguo funü chubanshe, 1995); for the Yi people of Yunnan, see Mueggler, "The Poetics of Grief"; for the Yi people of Gaoping, Yunnan, see She Weida, "Hunsang liyi gufeng you cun", *Yunnan ribao,* 2 April 2002, 3; for the Sui of Yunnan, see Hai Zuoliang, "Guo 'san guan' yu kujia ge", *Yunnan ribao,* 20 March 2001, 3; for the Miao people of Yunnan, see Xu Wenzhou, "Miaozu hunli sanbuqu", *Yunnan ribao,* 1 October 2001, 3; for the Hani laments of Yunnan, see Gang Feng, "Tianmi de kujia", *Yunnan ribao,* 9 July 2002, 3; for Suiyang County, Guizhou, see Cui Diyang, "Qianbei kujia ge", *Wenshi tiandi* 2 (2004): 57–59; for Tengxian County, Guangxi, see Huang Yanlian, "Qian xi Guangxi Tengxian Hanzu de kujia xisu he 'kujiage' de minus wenhua xianxiang", *Guangxi jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 2 (2002).

55. Anon., "Qite de Menggu zu hunli", *Neimenggu ribao,* 4 December 2001, 7.

56. Ruth Wing-Yu Yee [Yu Yongyu], "Tujiazu kujia ge yu qita Tujia minge fengge zhi bijiao", *Zhongguo yinyuexue* 4 (2000): 52.

57. *Tujia zu kujia ge zhi yinyue tezhengyu shehui hanyi,* 79. A lengthy collection of Tujia bridal laments are contained in the *Zhongguo geyao jicheng: Hunan juan* (Beijing: Zhongguo ISBN zhongxin: Xinhua shudian, 1999), 251–266. These songs reflect the various stages of the lament: Weeping at the Putting Up of the Hair, Weeping to One's Parents,

Weeping to the Older Brother and His Wife, Weeping to One's Sisters, Weeping over the Dowry, Weeping to the Matchmaker, Weeping When Ornaments Are Put On, Weeping at the Farewell to the Ancestors, and so on.

58. Watson, "Chinese Bridal Laments".

59. Translated by Watson, "Chinese Bridal Laments", 117; derived from Cheung, *K'u-ko-tzu-tz'u,* 36.

60. See Appendix 2, "Filling the Box," 1–2.

61. Kuang, "Sichuan Hanzu minjian hunli", 35.

62. Huang Zhong, "Kujia", 47–49; Kuang Tianqi, "Sichuan Hanzu minjian hunli", 34–36.

63. Xie, *Jiangyong 'Nüshu' zhi mi,* 3:1884–1885.

64. Collected in *Zhongguo geyao jicheng:* Guangxi juan, 1:79–93. Other minorities in Guangxi also perform *kujia;* see ibid., 2:770–774, 1397–1399.

65. *Zhonguo geyao jicheng:* Guangxi juan, 1:465–475.

66. Luo Tong, *Sichuan funü shehui diwei diaocha,* 138.

67. Jiang, "'Kujia ge' he gudai de hunyin xisu"; Kuang, "Sichuan Hanzu minjian hunli", 38–39; Huang Zhong "Kujia", 47–49. There are also parallels between Women's Script compositions known as Greetings on the Third Day (after marriage) and bridal laments. See, for example, instructions to the bride to adhere to the canonical protocols *(li)* for women as discussed in Liu Fei-wen, "Wenti yu wenjing de duihua", 112ff.

68. Cheung, *K'u-ko-tzu-tz'u,* 37, 41; Watson, "Chinese Bridal Laments", 118.

69. Ye and Wu, *Qianghun,* 153–154.

70. Sheng Yi, *Zhongguo hunsu wenhua,* 205; Wu Ruishu, *Nanfang minsu yu Chu wenhua* (Changsha: Yulu chubanshe, 1997), 150–151; Ye and Wu, *Qianghun,* 18–21,154–157.

71. Tan, *Zhongguo hunjia,* 19–20.

72. Cheung, *K'u-ko-tzu-tz'u,* 38.

73. Ibid., 47.

74. Watson, "Chinese Bridal Laments", 117–118.

75. Cheung, *K'u-ko-tzu-tz'u,* 44.

76. One can assume that prior to the twentieth century pure oral transmission would have been the norm. In the twentieth century, written transcriptions could play a role in women's mastery of the lament repertoire of a region; see Johnson, "Singing of Separation, Lamenting Loss", 32. She notes that talented women were always able to adapt the transmitted repertoire in creative ways (ibid.).

77. Yee, *Tujia zu kujia ge zhi yinyue,* 2.

78. Yee, "Tujiazu kujia ge", 47–48. In regions of Sichuan the tunes of bridal laments were the same as those of funeral laments; see Kuang Tianqi, "Sichuan Hanzu minjian hunli", 26–27.

79. Yee, *Tujia zu kujia ge zhi yinyue,* 157.

80. Ibid., 39–40, 91.

81. Ibid., 66

82. Jiang Bin, "'Kujia ge' he gudai de hunyin xisu", 198; reprinted in Tian Ying, *Lun Wuge ji qita,* 118–140.

83. Xie, *Jiangyong 'Nüshu' zhi mi,* 1884–1885.

84. Yee, "Tujiazu kujia ge", 58; Yee, *Tujia zu kujia ge,* 163ff.

85. Cheung, *K'u-ko-tzu-tz'u,* 127, 131.

86. Ibid., 87.

87. Ibid., 18.

88. Tan Daxian believes that the use of puns on component parts of Chinese characters (glyphomancy) in these laments parallels similar usages in Cantonese folk songs; *Zhongguo hunjia,* 207.

89. Cheung, *K'u-ko-tzu-tz'u,* 20; Watson, "Chinese Bridal Laments", 117.

90. Chan Wing-hoi, "Traditional Folksongs in the Rural Life of Hong Kong" (M.A. diss., Queen's University of Belfast, 1985), 20.

91. Ibid., 111

92. Ibid., 95.

93. Ibid., 36.

94. Ibid., 95.

95. Ibid., 110.

96. Ibid. Cheung also stresses that his female informants were proud of their ability to lament, which was seen as an aspect of "female virtue". It was considered a matter of shame if a woman could not perform laments (*K'u-ko-tzu-tz'u,* 1). The same could be said for lamenters in Nanhui.

97. "Traditional Folk Songs", 110.

98. Ibid., 112–113.

99. Ibid., 113.

100. Yee, "Tujiazu kujia ge yu qita", 46–48.

101. "Death and Abuse in Marriage Laments", 25–27.

102. There is another possibility. Given Cheung's belief in the "literary" and refined nature of the bridal laments of his home region, and the fact that he excluded some collected material from publication, it could be that he simply omitted matchmaker curses from his study because they were too 'crude'.

103. Ruth Wing-Yu Yee [Yu Yongyu], "Tujiazu kujia ge", 42; Johnson, "Singing of Separation, Lamenting Loss", 31.

104. "Tujiazu kujia ge", 44.

105. Yee, *Tujia zu kujia ge zhi yinyue tezheng,* 17.

106. Sha Yuan, "Lun kujia xisu", 89; Yee, *Tujia zu kujia ge zhi yinyue tezheng,* 208.

107. Yee, *Tujia zu kujia ge zhi yinyue tezheng,* 201–205.

Chapter 6: Shaking Heaven

1. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 9.

2. Catherine Bell notes that 'rites of affliction' seek to restore a perceived imbalance, to exorcise and purify through an act of propitiation; *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 115. In bridal laments the ritual efficacy is closer to exorcism than propitiation.

3. Von Glahn, *Sinister Way,* esp. 13 and passim.

4. Croll, *Changing Identities of Chinese Women,* 30–31.

5. Maurice Freedman, *The Study of Chinese Society: Essays by Maurice Freedman,* selected and introduced by G. William Skinner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1979), 283. According to Bray, ritual instruction texts allowed the principal wife a "ritual equality" in ancestral veneration denied other women of the family; *Technology and Gender,* 102; Fei Hsiao-tung noted, in a village near the Lake Tai area, that a woman could venerate with her husband at a domestic shrine within her home but not in the lineage ancestral hall; *Peasant Life in China,* 86. In China of the reform period, some rural women have created for themselves roles of unprecedented importance in ancestral rituals; Anne E. McLaren, "Women's Work and Ritual Space in China", in McLaren, ed., *Chinese Women-Living and Working* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 169–187.

6. "Myths, Gods, and Family Relations", in Meir Shahar and Robert P.Weller, eds., *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 152. Angela Zito notes the lack of female participation in the canonical rites *(li)* of the male elite; "Ritualizing Li: Implications for Studying Power and Gender", *positions* 1, no. 2 (1993): 340.

7. For a good overall survey, see Gates, *Chinese Motor,* chap. 9 ("Folk Ideologies: Women and Men"), 177–203. On women's religious devotion in the pre-modern period, see particularly Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 178–200; for translations of women's Buddhist writings, see Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 153–158, 319–333; on women's care for domestic deities, see Robert L. Chard, "Folktales on the God of the Stove", *Chinese Studies* 8, no. 1 (1990): 181–183 and Bray, *Technology and Gender,* 107–114; on the Seven Sisters festival of the Canton delta, see Janice E. Stockard, *Daughters of the Canton Delta: Marriage Patterns and Economic Strategies in South China, 1860–1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 41–44; see also discussion in Watson, "Girls' Houses and Working Women", 38–40. Chen Qinjian has uncovered a cult to the lavatory goddess in the lower Yangzi delta, discussed in McLaren, "Women's Work and Ritual Space", 176–178. Cults to female deities often exposed ambiguities and contradictions in popular understandings about proper female roles; see P. Steven Sangren, "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu, and the 'Eternal Mother'", *Signs* 9, no. 1, special issue: Women and Religion (Autumn 1983): 4–25, and Kenneth Pomeranz, "Power, Gender, and Pluralism in the Cult of the Goddess of Taishan", in Theodore Huters, R. Bin Wong, and Pauline Yu, eds., *Culture and State in Chinese History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 182–204.

8. In the series Minsu quyi congshu (Monograph series of studies in Chinese ritual theater and folklore) (Taipei: Shi Hezheng minsu wenhua jijin hui, 1993–2001).

9. Anne E. McLaren, *Chinese Popular Culture and Ming Chantefables* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1998), 82–89.

10. Ibid., 88.

11. Ibid.

12. For the roots of Chinese canonical ritual culture *(li),* see Michael Nylan, *The Five 'Confucian' Classics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), chap. 4 ("The Three *Rites* Canons"), 168–201. In societies with writing, codified ritual, and literate ritual specialists, the ritual practices of illiterate sectors are often ignored; see Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 132.

13. An exception is Elizabeth Johnson's study of women's participation in funeral ritual, "Grieving for the Dead, Grieving for the Living".

14. Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Confucianism and Family Rituals in Imperial China: A Social History of Writing about Rites* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Allen Chun, "The Practice of Tradition and the Writing of Custom, or Chinese Marriage from Li to Su", *Late Imperial China* 13, no. 2 (1992): 82–125; De Pee, "The Ritual and Sexual Bodies of the Groom and the Bride", 53–100.

15. Zito, "Ritualizing Li", 340.

16. *Confucianism and Family Rituals,* 227.

17. "The Practice of Tradition", 111. "Orthopraxy" refers to the unified practice of ritual behaviour in spite of significant variations in beliefs. See particularly Watson: "To be Chinese is to understand, and accept the view, that there is a correct way to perform rites associated with the life-cycle, the most important being weddings and funerals. By following accepted ritual routines ordinary citizens participated in the process of cultural unification"; "The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites", in James L. Watson and Evelyn S.Rawski, eds., *Death Ritual in Late Imperial China and Modern China,* 3.

18. "The Ritual and Sexual Bodies", 59.

19. Michael Nylan has noted that the canonical rites aimed at "a strong sense of balance" between "emotional extremes"; *The Five Confucian Classics,* 199.

20. Roy A. Rappaport, "Ritual", in Richard Bauman, ed., *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 249.

21. "Performance", in E. Barnouw, ed., *International Encyclopedia of Communications* (New York: Oxford University Press), 3:262; cited in Eric W. Rothenbuhler, *Ritual Communication: From Everyday Conversation to Mediated Ceremony* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 8–9.

22. See discussion by Bell in *Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions,* 139.

23. I have included references to repeated formulae in notes to the translation.

24. In this section I have also drawn on Rothenbuhler, *Ritual Communication,* see esp. 8–11, 21.

25. Ibid., 13–15, 43.

26. For example, see Rubie S. Watson, citing Victor Turner, "One of the primary tasks—of the marriage ritual was, I submit, to convert this unproductive daughter, a blade of wild grass, into a fertile wife"; "Chinese Bridal Laments", 118.

27. *Separation and Reunion in Modern China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 124–125.

28. For the importance of emotional transformation and its association with ritual efficacy, see Schieffelin, "Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality", 713, 721–

722. Johnson argues that bridal and funeral laments had a transformative effect on the performers and participants; "Singing of Separation, Lamenting Loss", 33.

29. There are parallels here with the oral culture of Paxtun women in Afghanistan. Benedicte Grima argues "that tears and the endurance of hardship exemplify Paxtun womanhood"; "The Role of Suffering", 79. She argues that a type of story told by Paxtun women called *tapos* is associated with an "aesthetic of suffering"; ibid., 87.

30. *Ritual Communication,* 30–32.

31. Ibid., 56

32. *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1999), 305.

33. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions,* 72.

34. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice,* 183.

35. Rothenbuhler, *Ritual Communication,* 26.

36. Ibid.

37. Zheng Xiaojiang, *Zhongguo bixie wenhua daguan* (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1994), 1:4. Zheng offers as an example the ancient story of the offering of a maiden to He Bo, the God of the Yellow River, in order to avoid a flood.

38. Zheng gives a general survey of the taboos attendant on Chinese marriages; ibid., 90–111. This section is also based on Jiang Bin; see his discussion of the exorcistic practices carried out in the Jiangnan area, *Wu Yue minjian xinyang minsu,* 246–253, as well as the lament corpus of Nanhui. The lament was only the beginning of a series of songs performed during marriage ceremonies. At the groom's home a series of songs and ritual chants were performed to bring on good fortune and ensure fertility. These were generally carried out by local women ritual specialists (not the bride) and were generally very short. Jiang Bin gives an account of these songs and chants in ibid. These songs of good fortune could be considered the counterpart to the wailing songs of the bridal departure.

39. Watson observes the same phenomenon for the region she surveyed in Hong Kong New Territories: "the marriage rites emphasized the hazards and dangers of the bride's journey"; "Chinese Bridal Laments", 121.

40. Xue Li, *Zhonghua minsu yuanliu jicheng: Hunyin juan* (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 1994), 259–260.

41. Ibid., 262. For other versions of this same story, see ibid., 264–265.

42. Zhenhai xian zhi, in Ding Shiliang, *Zhongguo difang zhi minsu ziliao huibian—Huadong zhuan,* vol. 2, 2nd ed. (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan chuanshe, 1997); cited in Pan Dan, "Kujia xisu tanwei", 33.

43. Xin Dengke, "Tujiazu kujia", *Zhongguo minzu bao,* 3 August 2001, 4; Ruth Yee, "Tujia zu kujia ge zhi yinyue tezhengyu shehui hanyi", 201.

44. Xie Zhimin, *Jiangyong 'Nüshu' zhi mi,* vol. 3, 1886.

45. Cheung, *K'u-ko-tzu-tz'u,* 131.

46. Anderson, "Songs of the Hong Kong Boat People", 20.

47. Pan, "Kujia xisu tanwei", 33–34.

48. Obviously not all women lamenters would necessarily have this ritual understanding, particularly in the changed circumstances of the late twentieth century.

49. Zheng, *Zhongguo bixie wenhua daguan,* 15–16.

50. Nanhui saying: "Zuo yiyang, xiang yiyang, chi doufu pi qu la liangsheng."

51. Bell has pointed out the capacity of rituals to relate within a "ritual system that creates homologies between different ritual situations"; *Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions,* 173.

52. Similarly, villagers in Kwan Mun Hau stressed the importance of appropriate funeral rites to help the deceased find its grave and spirit tablet; see Johnson, "Singing of Separation, Lamenting Loss", 38.

53. Ren Jiahe, *Ku sang ge,* 44.

54. Ren, *Hunsang yishi ge,* 110.

55. Ibid., 112.

56. Johnson, in her study of Kwan Mun Hau laments, found a similar focus in funeral laments on the individual grievances of the lamenter. Grievances expressed in funeral laments included "the death of children, neglect by their husbands, discrimination by their mothers-in-law, and neglect by members of their natal families"; "Singing of Separation, Lamenting Loss", 32.

57. Michael Nylan argues that the practice of rites was intended to have a morally transformative effect; *Confucian Classics,* 171. On the marriage process in the *Book of Rites,* see her discussion on ibid., 171.

58. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions,* 147. Confucian state and family rituals were distinct from the local religious rites of appeasement and appeal; ibid., 185.

59. David I. Kertzer notes the "frequently dramatic character" of ritual acts; *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 10.

Afterword

1. "Shi shi ye, nei wu yuan nü, wai wu kuang fu."

2. I have discussed this in "The Grievance Rhetoric of Chinese Women: From Lamentation to Revolution", *Intersections* 4 (June 2000), 18 pp.

3. Gu Bingquan, *Shanghai fengsu guji kao* (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue, 1993), 55.

4. Robert Ash and Luo Qi, *Economic Development in Shanghai and the Yangtze Delta: A City Reborn* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1998),165–169.

5. "Jinri Nanhui fengguang hao".

6. Xu Xiaoqing, "Cong Shanghai Nanhui xian Jiating jiegou de bianqian kan nongcun chengshihua de yanjiu", *Shehui* 5 (2001): 35.

7. See Sally Sargeson's survey of the coastal province of Zhejiang, "Building for the Future Family", in Anne E. McLaren, ed., *Chinese Women: Living and Working,* 158. In Nanhui it is common to find the younger generation living in new homes with two storeys while their parents continue to live in the dilapidated tenement buildings of the past.

8. Li, "20 shiji Jiang Zhe Hu nongcun", 10.

9. Xu, "Cong Shanghai Nanhui xian", 35. Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winckler note that this is a broader phenomenon. As young men show a reluctance to provide for the older generation, families are placing more reliance on their daughters even in rural

China; *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 283–284.

10. Xu, "Cong Shanghai Nanhui xian", 36.

Appendix 2: The Bridal Laments of Pan Cailian of Shuyuan, Nanhui

1. Ren, *Hun sang yishi ge,* 3–31.

2. This stock phrase denotes that the family is too poor to bathe (a lamp is too small to bathe in).

3. In Chinese belief, when one selects a wheat stalk it is actually Buddha who acts through that person. But in this case the bride declares their family is so ill-fated that the devils, not Buddha, do the selection.

4. Shadow cast by the eaves. In this case the eaves are narrow and low.

5. Lines 16–19 form a regular quatrain of seven syllables to a line and appear to be a common formula.

6. Knocked down in 1966.

7. Houses are built to back onto the waterways that criss-cross this region. Women wash rice by the canal outside the door. Wealthier homes have stone walkways by the canal.

8. The placing of the nail determines its balance.

9. Shellfish, an everyday food, best eaten in the sunny season. The "mouldy season" refers to the rainy season in this region during June and July.

10. An unusually contemporary image.

11. That is, it will be as if living in an official household. This is an exaggeration of the status of the groom's family. Tribute rice was the grain transported to the capital along the Grand Canal in imperial times.

12. Because she was born unlucky, the family she marries into will also be ill-fated and will not prosper. This theme will recur in "Thanking the Matchmaker 2". This section also sounds like a curse of the groom's family.

13. You are exaggerating. Your assurances are not solid.

14. Another exaggerated reference to the size of their property and their "official" status.

15. Most people in this area grow *nuomi* (sticky rice) for use on ritual occasions such as New Year. The idea here is that they can afford to plant all kinds of rice and have enough for both ritual and subsistence needs.

16. That is, they are have married into noble and official families.

17. The implication here is that the groom's family own a shop and so do not need to purchase these items.

18. That is, you will have to get up early, retire late, and toil all day.

19. Lines 130–132 present images of things that are not what they appear to be. Red beans turn out to have white flowers; when you fry a grape you ruin it. (This refers to the mother's actions in marrying her off). She is being offered like a plate of tripe—that is, an object of derision—to the groom's family.

20. So the father can bow all the lower; see Thanking the Father, lines 65–66.

21. A crude bowl made of enamel.

22. The expression *toutai* refers to rebirth through reincarnation.

23. That is, no words of complaint that you were a girl. This shows his goodwill towards her from birth.

24. The winter melon is planted in separate clumps. So, too, the bride will have to be replanted in her new environment.

25. This is the coverlet for the marriage bed and a standard part of the bride's dowry. This section should be interpreted as a hyperbolic statement about the poverty of the natal family, which cannot afford to give her a dowry.

26. A formulaic expression. As well as poverty, this indicates that her feet are unbound. For a similar example from Jinshan, see *Zhongguo minjian gequ jicheng:* Shanghai juan, 746.

27. Unlike the natal family, the groom's family has influence and education. They are *chuchang ren,* those who circulate in society.

28. Wealthy families of the region. Line 266 refers to Cao Yan Lou, which could be a mistake for the Shaolou Xi family.

29. *Shi dai jiu ting:* a description of the enclosed courtyard residences found in local townships.

30. The following lines about the cock crowing and the daughter-in-law beginning her chores are a common formula. For another example, this time from the neighbouring county of Songjiang, see *Zhongguo minjian gequ jicheng:* Shanghai juan, 741.

31. Used in washing rice.

32. Metaphors indicating an inability to get along with people.

33. For a similar line, see Bao shang jiao, line 4.

34. Repetition of line 361.

35. A tiny weight. Ten *qian* make up one *liang.*

36. Offering the bride a final bowl of rice is part of the lamentation ritual. See "A Bowl of Rice".

37. Removal of the barrel used for human waste and dumping the contents in the cesspit was one of the duties of the younger women and girls. In the lower Yangzi delta, a cult favoured by unmarried girls developed around the Kengsan guniang, or Goddess of the Lavatory. For details of this cult see McLaren, "Women's Work and Ritual Space in China", 169–187.

38. Ren, *Hunsang yishi ge,* 44–48.

39. Usually the fourth month, an inaccuracy.

40. *La[zhu] tai* candlesticks are made of pewter.

41. The *tianyu* pot has a large mouth and is used to store sugar, soy sauce, and ginger. The *beng* pot has a large belly and a small mouth and is used for liquids such as wine and vinegar.

42. A copper-nickel alloy.

43. Rural homes were unheated during winters even in the late 1990s. The hand and foot warmers were metal containers in which were placed hot ash from the fire with fine holes at the top to allow steam to escape.

44. The *haitang,* or steep embankment, bordering the reclaimed soil and the Donghai ocean.

45. The *qianzi* and the *tieta* (multi-toothed hoe) were common agricultural implements of the region.

46. Most stoves in this region had two apertures or burners where the main dishes were cooked. A pot known as a *tangguan* (soup pot) was placed near the burners on the hot stove to keep warm water used in cooking. Here the daughter likens her parents to the two burners and herself to the soup pot. The water has no taste of its own, nor can it emit sound if struck.

47. Metaphors drawn from the husking of rice using mortar and pestle. She cannot be easily "blended", that is, she is not socially adept in dealing with people. The "sisters" here can also refer to girlfriends.

48. A formula referring to the twirling of the sleeves when bowing and kowtowing.

49. Winter snow freezes on the northern wall (at the rear) but melts first at the southern wall (front).

50. The *baozheng* were in charge of villages and groups of families in the Qing dynasty, a system that continued into the early Republican years.

51. That is, rather than just rely on the matchmaker.

52. "Pepper hand", *lashou* refers to unscrupulous, vicious tactics. These images imply that "that family" is clever but ruthless.

53. See also "Filling the Box", line 130. An image to describe deceit.

54. Ren, *Hunsang yishi ge,* 52–53.

55. In early summer the potato fiber is still tough; here it becomes a symbol for the tenacious bonds of affection binding granddaughter and grandfather.

56. Festival food was first offered to seniors in the family and only then to the children. Here, the bride claims that her grandfather cherished her so much he gave her the festival food first.

57. In the early twentieth century, women were expected to include six quilts as part of their trousseau. The minimum was two. Poor families had to try hard to make up the number.

58. Foreign cloth was finely made and had a sheen. However, it was more expensive and was thus a more valuable gift.

59. Ren, *Hun sang yishi ge,* 54–55.

60. The *jiguan hua* is an annual red flower with needle-shaped leaves and pointed tips.

61. Foreign coins circulated in Shanghai from the mid- to late nineteenth century. The image she is seeing would be a foreign bird that she perceives as a Chinese crane, which symbolizes long life. The golden twig symbolizes wealth. These images accentuate the value of her uncle's gift.

62. Here the bride is showing her filial piety, but the father will add it to her trousseau.

63. *Bang changmian* add to the display. This indirectly refers to the "opening of the trousseau" *(kai xiang)* ceremony to be held during the wedding ceremony at the groom's house.

64. The copper coins had holes in the middle and were kept on strings. One thousand copper coins could be exchanged for one silver foreign dollar.

65. This implies that they did not eat meat to save money. Fish was the cheapest dish in this region, where all villages were surrounded by canals and streams.

66. Ren, *Hun sang yishi ge,* 57–64.

67. A sign of desperation. Typically at the rear of households would be found a wall made of reeds. The slip of paper with the birth signs, once accepted by the groom's side, would be placed on the stove platform for three days. If no inauspicious events occurred during this time, then the family would continue to consider the match. Alternatively, the set of birth signs could be placed in the niche altar inside the house. To place it in a crack of the reed wall demeans the bride. She is so valueless that her birth signs cannot be taken inside.

68. Literally, a "five-point match". A perfect match would be ten points. However, this was very rare. An acceptable match would be five points or more.

69. That is, there is no need for a bride-price. This is untrue, but it is a psychological tactic the bride imagines the matchmaker might use.

70. In contrast to the usual custom of taking money from the groom's home to the bride's home. The bride here imagines the difficulty the matchmaker had in marrying her off.

71. The bride puts these words into the mouth of the matchmaker to dramatize the latter's persuasive power.

72. Rice water is the water in which rice has been cooked.

73. A *dan* is a large weight; in the modern period it is equivalent to 50 kilograms.

74. This apparently refers to an auspicious carving or marking on the middle section of the ridgepole of the home.

75. The 'pearl lamps' were gas lamps, found only in the homes of the affluent in the early twentieth century.

76. A courtesy expression of gratitude.

77. During this lament the matchmaker and other women help the bride to put on her jewellery and regalia. Lines 79–81 are also found in the lament of Wu Caiying of Fengxian county; see *Zhongguo minjian gequ jicheng:* Shanghai juan, 736.

78. *Shusheng,* "student". This could refer to women who have received a Western style of education, such as that provided in mission schools in towns along the lower Yangzi delta from the late nineteenth century.

79. *Hunqi yishang* refers to sexy clothing, i.e., of the flesh, as opposed to plainer clothing *(su).* The bride imagines that wealthy brides have so much fine clothing that they can wear it on ordinary occasions.

80. Ren, *Hun sang yishi ge,* 65–66.

81. Ibid., 67–70.

82. Both words refer to mother, however, *niang* is reserved for the bride's birth mother. The term "three-day mama" refers to the final three days of farewells and laments before the bride departs. In this case, the bride exaggerates the case by adding that her mama will put in the effort of a six-day birth mother.

83. This contradicts the mother's earlier statement about the "wizened" skin of the father, due to his hard toil (see "Filling the Box", 523). The bride here is inflating her qualifications to serve as instructress. The same formula 'white-faced scholar' will be later applied

to the brides procured by wealthy families. In this line and the next the bride implies that the *xiniang* has the attributes of both her father and her mother.

84. The tray on which the bride gift (usually cash) was placed was covered with a padded embroidered cloth. This was usually given as a gift to the Fortunate Woman.

85. Ren, *Hun sang yishi ge,* 71–73.

86. For similar lament material, see the lament of Ji Liangmei of Nanhui and Xu Xiaomei, also of Nanhui (*Zhongguo minjian gequ jicheng,* 748).

87. Ren, *Hun sang yishi ge,* 74–75.

88. See *Zhongguo minjian gequ jicheng,* 765.

89. This refers to the *saosao*'s spittle that she uses to moisten the cloth.

90. The *saosao* allows her to have more than her share of the woven cloth.

91. Ren, *Hunsang yishi ge,* 76–79.

92. Similar lament material is found other singers of the Nanhui repertoire; see the laments of Xu Xiaomei, Ji Liangmei, and Wang Xuehong in *Zhongguo minjian gequ jicheng,* 756, 760.

93. That is, agreement to the items in the trousseau.

94. The brother travels in a light skiff managed by standing up on the boat and pulling on a single pole.

95. Lines 28 and 29 are parallel in structure.

96. This refers to a folk belief that worms rely on the soil of their native place for sustenance. It signifies that she will not be able to adapt to life elsewhere.

97. A double entendre, because the same expression also means "I do not know whether I can cope with the days to come".

98. Ren, *Hunsang yishi ge,* 80–89.

99. Lines 5–60 parallel lament material as sung by Ji Liangmei, also of Nanhui; see *Zhongguo minjian gequ jicheng:* Shanghai juan, 231. The description of the bridal sedan is reminiscent of a lament by Xu Xiaomei of Nanhui, 734–735.

100. The large one is for the bride and the others for the Fortunate Woman and the matchmaker.

101. The mother is not allowed to accompany her.

102. More elaborate sedan chairs in this region featured glass panes on three signs with inset silhouettes of folk motifs, such as figures from local opera. This type of glass was referred to in this region as "foreign mirror" *(xiyang jing).*

103. There is a taboo on the use of rope to bind the trousseau because rope is used to tie up animals. Special cloth is used to roll up the bedding and cloth in the trousseau.

104. Items of furniture are counted by the number of legs. This line refers to six pieces of furniture.

105. They are wealthy enough to have a range of thick and thin bedding.

106. This refers to the pattern on the curtains—a fertility symbol.

107. Here the bride complains that her family is so poor that the bride-price was used to buy the necessities of life, not to buy a lavish trousseau for the bride.

108. For the same image, see "Thanking the Matchmaker" 1, lines 144–145.

109. These are two duties of the matchmaker.

110. That is, she works day and night.

111. One-and-a-half *jin*. The average in Nanhui was around one *jin* a day.

112. Used in making patterns for shoes or decorative patterns for windows.

113. Ren, *Hunsang yishi ge,* 90–92.

114. These words are said to the brothers during the 'calling back' ceremony. The final line has a double meaning. It also means "I do not know how I can cope with life".

115. The bride will refer to the God of the Stove, a god who will control her daily life, in the next lament, "The House".

116. Ren, *Hunsang yishi ge,* 93–96.

117. When setting out on a journey, officials were accompanied by retainers who held up a big sign calling passersby to get out of the way. This hyperbolic image calls to mind the formidable nature of this rich and powerful family.

118. Some of the apertures on the stove are for the cooking of clean water. In this household the clean water aperture is huge and the water is very deep, hence "dark" as in line 46.

119. These were large earthenware pitchers used for growing lotus flowers.

120. That is, it has not been washed properly.

Glossary

age 阿哥
aiku 哀哭
ajiu 阿舅
ashen 阿嬸
ayi jie jiefu 阿姨接姐夫
bai yangtian 白洋鈿
bang changmian 幫場面
ban niu qin 扳鈕親
baozhang 保長
baozheng 保正
beidiao 悲調
beng 甭
bie renjia xifu 別人家媳婦
bijiao 壁角
bixie 避邪
botuo luobo dipi kuan, jia chu guniang asao huan 拨脱萝卜地皮宽，家出姑娘阿嫂欢。
bu ku bu fa 不哭不發
caili 彩禮
cai zhuren jia 財主人家
caoliang mifan 漕糧米飯
caoxie 草鞋
chai zi 拆字
chandao 鏟刀
changmian 場面
changxiu 長袖
cheng 秤
Chenghuang nainai 城皇奶奶
chong 舂
chou beitou 綢被頭
chu cai jing 出材經
chuchang ren 出場人
cun gu'er 村姑兒
dadui qinjuan 大隊親眷
daiku 代哭
dama 大媽
dan 担
Datuan 大團
diaozhe da yue 弔者大悅
ding qin 定親
dou yin 抖音
duanqi jing 斷氣經
fan 飯
fanhua 反話
fufu shuangquan zhe 夫婦雙全者
ge 歌
ge ku 歌哭
getang 歌堂
gongpo daren 公婆大人
guan zuo zhu 官作主
guiju da lai, lishu duo 規矩大來，禮數多
guntu 棍徒
guomen xifu 過門媳婦
haili ren 海裏人
haitang 海塘
haiyang wan 海洋碗
halu you 蛤露油
Han E 韓娥
haotao xi 嚎咷戲

he ba zi 合八字
Hong Bian 洪梗
hua hao dao hao, niang hao, nan hao 花好稻好，娘好囡好
hua hao ri 話好日
huangdi guanjia 皇帝官家
huangni zaotou 黃泥灶頭
huangsha botou 黃沙缽頭
huangtong jiaolu 黃桶腳爐
huanyi jing 換衣經
Huazhou 華周
hudie jiaolian 蝴蝶鉸鏈
hunqi yishang 葷氣衣裳
huntun 餛飩
jiafa 家法
jiaoquan 絞圈
jiaotong 腳桶
jiazhuang 嫁妝
jiguan hua 雞冠花
Jin Shengtan 金聖歎 (?1610–1661)
jing 經
Jingjiang 靜江
jiuzhong 酒盅
kaolao 栲栳
Kengsan guniang 坑三姑娘
kezhi 克制
ku 哭
ku Cunxiao 哭存孝
kudiao 哭調
kudiao huiqi 哭掉晦气
ku er guo shi 哭而過市
kumiao 哭廟
kuqiang 哭腔
ku Qin ting 哭秦庭
kuqi zhi ai 哭泣之哀
ku tan chenju 哭歎襯句
ku yong 哭踴
ku zhi 哭之
kuzhou 哭咒
ku zu miao 哭祖廟
lanbu 藍布
lan nü zi you lan lang pei, mei you lan nü shang hui dui 懶女自有懶郎配，沒有懶女上灰堆
lashou 辣手
la[zhu]tai 蠟[燭]台
li 禮
lianbai shusheng dushu ren 臉白書生，讀書人
liang bian zhu 兩邊住
linbie fan 臨別飯
Lingnan 嶺南
lingtai jing 靈台經
loushang ren 樓上人
Lu Wengong 魯文公
magua 馬褂
maixi 麥粞
Mama 媽媽
maozhu kuai 毛竹筷
meiren 媒人
mendu dama 門度大媽
Meng Jiangnü 孟姜女
Meng Zong 孟宗
mianbai shusheng 面白書生
mianluo 面鑼
min jia funü 民家婦女
nan pa zuo wenzhang, nü pa ku liangsheng 男怕做文章，女怕哭兩聲
nao dongfang 鬧洞房
niangjia 娘家
niangjia kude ying tian xiang/pojia jiadang tata zhang 娘家哭得應天響，婆家家當塔塔漲
niangjiu 娘舅
nuomi 糯米
nuoxi 儺戲
Nüwu 女巫
peijia 陪嫁
pei qian huo 賠錢貨
pei shi zimei 陪十姊妹
Peng Qiutan 彭秋潭
po cai dang zai 破財擋災
pojia 婆家
puxie 蒲鞋
qi 妻
Qi (Wife Qi) 杞
qiang qin 搶親
qie 妾

Qiliang 杞梁
Qin 欽
Qu Dajun 屈大均
qu qin gege 娶親哥哥
renqing 人情
Ren yao lian pi, shu yao shu pi 人要臉皮，樹要樹皮
sanku 散哭
san zhao 三朝
saosao 嫂嫂
sazhang 撒帳
shang dianjia 上店家
shangmen nüxu 上門女婿
shan ku qi fu 善哭其夫
shaqi 煞氣
Shen Baoxu 申包胥
Sheng 盛
shi dai jiu ting 十埭九廳
shi sheng da 勢勝大
Shi shi ye, nei wu yuan nü, wai wu kuang fu 是時也，內無怨女，外無曠夫
shuiqiao 水橋
Shun 舜
shun 順 obedience
shunkouliu 順口溜
shusheng 書生
si chu ba xiang 四櫥八箱
si ye zongtou 四葉棕頭
song lao 送老
su 素
tangguan 湯罐
tangshui 湯水
Taohuanü 桃花女
taotou 套頭
tengdou 藤鬥
ti 啼
tianyu 田盂
tongyangxi 童養媳
toutai 投胎
tuan 團
tufei 土匪
tusi 土司
waichang 外場
waiguo yancong 外國煙囪
waitou ren 外頭人
wanjiao 挽轎
wenming xin shi 文明新式
wenyan shi de minge 文言式的民歌
wujiao 屋角
Xi 奚
xianfen 線粉
xiaojiao yishuang, yanlei yigang 小腳一雙，眼淚一缸
xiniang 喜娘
xiyang jing 西洋鏡
xuanjuan 宣卷
Yan 堰
yan 眼
yangbu 洋布
yang qing maozi, da hong ding 洋青帽子，大紅頂
yang xifu 養媳婦
Yao 堯
yao hao kan, yao huamiao 要好看，要花妙
ya xiongsha 壓凶煞
yishi ge 儀式歌
youzhan 油盞
yuanzi 圓子
yue ku yue fa 越哭越發
yushen 娛神
zao 灶
zaojun gonggong 灶君公公
zhetou huo 折頭貨
zhiqi 志氣
Zhong 鍾
zhou 粥
Zhou Qufei 周去非
Zhu hen ji 硃痕記
Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊
zuo ge tang 坐歌堂
zuoguan zuofu 做官做府
zuo yiyang, yao xiang yiyang, chidoufu pi qu la liang sheng 做一樣，要像一樣，吃豆腐皮去拉兩聲

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